

CITIZEN GORE VIDAL • PALIN'S PREACHERS

NOVEMBER 2008

IN THESE TIMES

20 races you
should **watch**

Modern-day
Selma in **Arizona**



FACE OFF

Chip Berlet, Hans Johnson, Esther Kaplan,
David Moberg, David Sirota and Slavoj Žižek report

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Dear Friend,

This year I turned 96 years old. I've only got a little time left. No more books or articles. No more Cubs games. No more bourbon. That's it! But that doesn't mean I haven't got any fight left in me. And I want to talk to you today about one way I'm planning to keep my fight alive, and that's by leaving a bequest in my will to *In These Times*.

The big thing that bothers me is the lack of history in American life today. Gore Vidal used the phrase "United States of Amnesia" to describe our country. I call it the United States of Alzheimer's. Americans today forget what happened yesterday.

If you ask young people today about Eugene V. Debs, Jane Addams, FDR, Henry Wallace, Martin Luther King, Jr. and what it was these people did, they wouldn't know. We can make sure that after you and I are gone the legacies of these great Americans don't go with us.

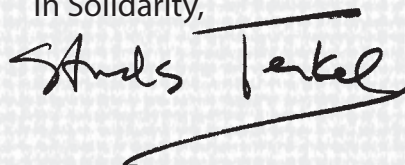
As a fellow member of the *In These Times* community, I am writing to ask you to join me in leaving a bequest to *In These Times* and keep great democratic ideals alive, keep history alive.

The Bush Administration has turned democracy into one big burlesque show. The education system that should be teaching our kids history is the pits. We can't make any choices about the future unless we connect to the past.

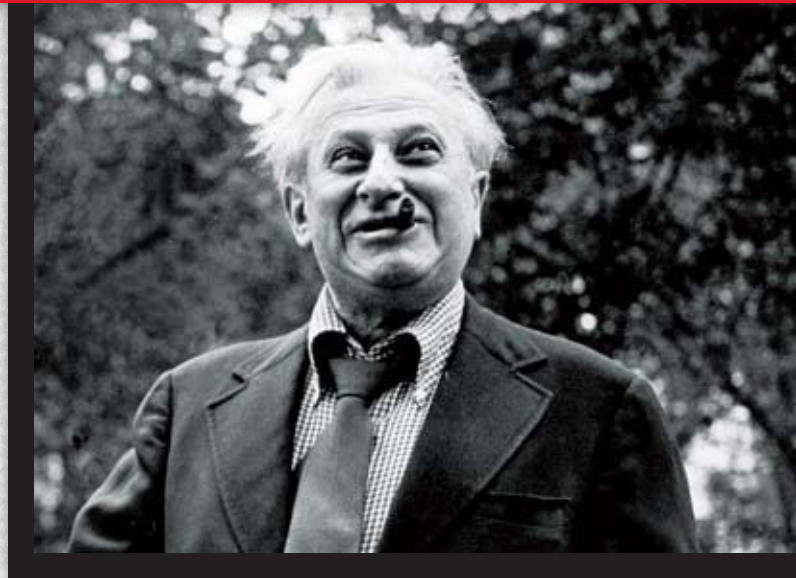
My old friend Jim Weinstein, the historian and founder of *In These Times*, insisted we remember the past in order to understand the present and prepare for the future. And, in part, because of my bequest, I know the good fight—the fight for democracy, for civil rights, for the rights of workers—has a future, for these values will live on in the pages of *In These Times* when I'm gone.

Thanks for your time.

In Solidarity,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Studs Terkel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal line extending from the end of the name.

Studs Terkel



P.S. If you have any questions, or would like to let *In These Times* know that you've taken action and made a bequest, call Editor & Publisher Joel Bleifuss at (773) 772-0100, write him at *In These Times*, 2040 N. Milwaukee, Chicago, IL 60647, or e-mail him at jbleifuss@inthesetimes.com.

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BY DAVID BARSAMIAN

editorial

Demons Out!

THE NEOCONS WHO sold Americans the Iraq War are working hand in hand with the Christian Right to make sure that a McCain-Palin administration will take up where Bush-Cheney leaves off.

Building on doubts some white Americans have about electing a black president, their strategy is to stoke fear that Sen. Barack Obama is the Antichrist. Google it and you will find more than 1.3 million Web entries that discuss Obama and Anti-Christ.

In early August, the McCain campaign released an online ad titled "The One," that suggests Obama could be the Antichrist. McCain campaign officials denied they were trying to draw parallels, but many Christian fundamentalists understood. The ad portrayed images that are only found in the 16 books of the "Left Behind" series—63 million copies sold to date.

Tim LaHaye, the series' co-author, is a key strategist of the Christian Right. He is also the founding president of the Council for National Policy (CNP), a secretive organization that brings together leaders of the American right to coordinate political strategy. Prior to the Republican National Convention, the CNP met in Minneapolis, where members watched Gov. Sarah Palin on the stage with Sen. John McCain as she accepted his choice of her as his running mate. According to a CNP member in attendance, "That room in Minneapolis watching on the television screen was electrified. I have not seen anything like it in a long time."

LaHaye, for one, doubts that Obama is the Antichrist. He told Christian Newswire, "I can see by the language [Obama] uses why people think he could be the Antichrist, but from my reading of Scripture, he doesn't meet the criteria."

Of course, if there's anything scarier than the Antichrist, it's a Muslim. In July, Fox News conducted a poll, asking:

"Some people believe Barack Obama, despite his professed Christianity, is secretly a Muslim. ... What do you believe?" The results: 10 percent of respondents said he was Muslim and 27 percent said they didn't know.

In September, New York's Dutchess County GOP Chairwoman Corrine Weber forwarded this e-mail to party members: "The Antichrist will be a man, in his 40s, of MUSLIM descent, who will deceive the nations with persuasive language, and have a MASSIVE Christ-like appeal. ... Do we recognize this description?? ... I refuse to take a chance on this unknown candidate who came out of nowhere."

If you have doubts about the dangers Muslims pose, watch *Obsession: Radical Islam's War Against the West*. Tom Trento, director of the Watch Obsession Citizen Education Program, is traveling the country promoting this documentary. "The Muslim faith has been hijacked by extremists who want to destroy every culture but their own," he told Christian Newswire.

In September in 14 battleground states, 28 million DVDs of *Obsession* were sent to the subscribers of 70 local and national newspapers, including the *New York Times* and *Wall Street Journal*.

The mass distribution was coordinated by the Endowment for Middle East Truth. The group's advisory board includes four neoconservative luminaries who helped sell Americans on the need for the Iraq War: Meyrav Wurmser of the Hudson Institute, Daniel Pipes of the Middle East Forum, Frank Gaffney of the Center for Security Policy and former CIA Director James Woolsey. Gaffney and Woolsey are both associated with the CNP and have addressed the group's secret conventions.

Let's hope that this time around their machinations are less successful.

—Joel Bleifuss

IN THESE TIMES

"With liberty and justice for all..."

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mixed reaction

JUST THE FACTS



16.6 Millions of barrels of oil the United States will consume each day in 2030, as estimated by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA)

65 Percentage of those barrels of oil that the EIA estimates will come from foreign sources

33.7 Percentage of those barrels of oil that the EIA estimates will come from current domestic sources

1.2 Percentage of those barrels that the EIA estimates new domestic offshore drilling could conceivably provide

4 Number of days of U.S. oil consumption in 2030 that new offshore drilling will be able to provide

“

We naturally associate democracy, to be sure, with freedom of action, but freedom of action without freed capacity of thought behind it is only chaos.

”

—JOHN DEWEY, AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGIST AND SOCIAL CRITIC, IN THE DECEMBER 1903 ISSUE OF *THE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL TEACHER*

LABANARAMA BY TERRY LABAN



QUID PRO QUO

THE QUID:

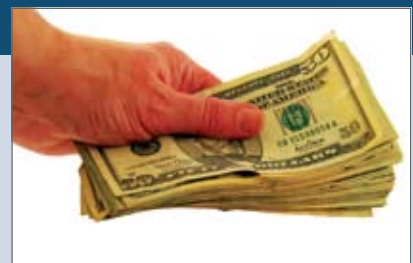
For years, it's been an implicit tenet of conservatism that those who give the most to public servants deserve to get the most back in return. So it's nice to see some GOP lawmakers explicitly proposing that they apply the same logic to themselves.

The proposal came about—according to a Sept. 23 report on Politico.com—because many Republican House members aren't ponying up as much

campaign cash to their brethren in tighter election races.

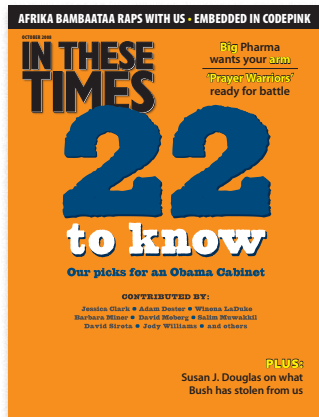
THE QUO:

Rep. Devin Nunes (R-Calif.) arrived at a novel solution: When doling out cherry subcommittee assignments to lawmakers, eschew outmoded considerations like seniority or relevant experience, and instead give them to those who have donated the most. Sadly, it appears House Minority



Leader John Boehner (R-Ohio) has put the kibosh on Nunes' free-market thinking, reportedly telling him, "We are not going to get in the business of members buying seats."

letters



No Prospective Recruit Left Behind

By focusing on the most visible example of school militarization, Allen McDuffee ("No JROTC Left Behind," September) neglects to mention a more far-reaching attempt to recruit students.

No Child Left Behind requires schools to provide the names, addresses and phone numbers of secondary students to the Department of Defense. Although schools are required to inform students and parents of their right to opt-out of this, the ways in which schools provide this information, if at all, varies.

Furthermore, as the Government Accountability Office routinely finds incidents of recruiter irregularities, it isn't hard to imagine recruiters or military spokespeople misrepresenting the facts to schools or families.

This nationwide recruitment of high school students is surely more significant than the recruitment of students at military schools (who made

the choice to attend these schools in the first place).

*Jonathan Nycz
Marshall, Mich.*

All Guns Created Equal

The concerns expressed by Kristian Williams and Peter Little ("Guns and Race," September) were valid in the 19th and 20th centuries, but no longer hold.

The National Rifle Association encourages almost everyone to have a firearm for

gun shows must be either outlawed or properly monitored. Then scofflaw dealers should be closed for good.

*John Stickler
Via E-mail*

Red Crimes

Your Vietnam war crimes essay in the August 2008 issue ("War Crimes Hunter") failed to note the real mass murders committed by the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong. Check out Hue City and its

Do whites have more guns than non-whites? With some 30,000 bullet-wound deaths per year, the question should be, 'How many guns is enough?'

their own "safety," and writes laws for our legislators to pass to that end. Anyone can purchase a handgun or an automatic rifle at open gun shows—no questions asked.

Indeed, with more than 300 million firearms in U.S. households, the country now has more weapons than Americans.

Do whites have more guns than non-whites? With some 30,000 bullet-wound deaths per year, the question is meaningless. The question we should ask is, 'How many guns is enough?'

Limiting purchases to "only" 12 per year doesn't seem to be reducing the death toll. (Wouldn't one per year be adequate?)

For starters, the ban on automatic weapons must be reinstated and unregulated

5,000 civilians murdered by Reds during the war.

*Garry Smallwood
Bulan, Ky.*

CORRECTION

The editorial "United We Fail" (October) incorrectly credited Health Care for America Now as the sponsor of the Harry and Louise healthcare reform television ads. The ad campaign is headed up by Families USA with the support of four other organizations, including the American Hospital Association and the American Cancer Society's Cancer Action Network.

Also, in "22 to Know," Senior Editor Laura S. Washington suggested that, if selected by Obama, Valerie Jarrett would be the first woman to be the secretary of the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In fact, Carla A. Hills and Patricia R. Harris have both been HUD secretaries.

We regret the errors.

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It's official: the new and improved InTheseTimes.com has arrived. Visit the revamped site for videos, weekly Web-only interviews with progressive activists, as well as Web columns and features. And become an InTheseTimes.com member (it's free!) to comment on stories and contact other readers.

We're already brainstorming the next phase of the site's redesign, and we'd like your feedback.



Also, check out Michael Wilson's column about the African-American generational divide.

"I am caught between the hope and fear of the generations before and after me," he writes. "These generations are not theoretical abstractions. ... They are my father and my daughter."



contributors

Dear Reader,

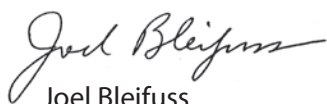
I hope you are as happy as we are with *In These Times'* new paper and color photos. We made the change for two reasons:

First, marketing. This new look, by putting us on equal graphic footing with other magazines, will help increase bookstore sales.

Second, price. Our new printer is cheaper than our old one, helping us save money on production costs.

If you see other ways that we can improve the quality of your magazine, please contact me.

In solidarity,



Joel Bleifuss
Editor & Publisher

P.S. A big thank you on behalf of all *In These Times* staff to those who responded to our appeal for donations. We are doing everything we can to pull through in these tough times. We couldn't do it without you.

**YOUR IDEALS CAN LIVE ON.
REMEMBER IN THESE TIMES IN YOUR WILL.**

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Irma Hernandez holds a sign during a demonstration outside the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) building on Sept. 3, in Washington, D.C.

BRENDAN HOFFMAN/GETTY IMAGES

Breaking the ICE Record

Feds arrest 592 immigrant workers at a Mississippi electronics factory

BY KARI LYDERSEN

ON AUG. 25, FEDERAL agents from Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) conducted the largest single workplace raid in U.S. history. Agents stormed Howard Industries electronics factory in Laurel, Miss., taking into custody 592 immigrant workers from a workplace that was in the midst of contentious union contract negotiations.

As in Postville, Iowa, New Bedford, Mass., and other sites of recent massive workplace raids, immigrant rights advocates say the real story is only now unfolding, as the fear unleashed by the raids ripples through the community.

Even the people who weren't arrested are afraid to leave their homes. Fam-

ily members of the detained say they are living in a state of limbo, since they don't know what their loved ones' fates will be. Some say they still don't know where their relatives are being detained.

ICE spokesman Brandon Alvarez-Montgomery disputes that charge. He says the agency has made efforts to ensure families could communicate with the detained.

"ICE, myself included, contacted ... the governor's office, the mayor's office, all major community groups and NGOs while on site that morning, to provide a toll free number to call for status and updates on individuals being detained and where they were being sent or held," Alvarez-Montgomery says.

Officials charged nine people with ag-

gravated identity theft—which could mean up to two years in prison and a \$250,000 fine. They were later turned over to U.S. marshals. Another 468 people were charged with administrative violations. At least 43 have been deported, and the rest are being held in the LaSalle Detention Center in Jena, La.

For humanitarian reasons, an additional 106 people were not detained, but instead released with electronic monitoring anklets pending court dates. Nine juveniles were handed over to the federal Office of Refugee Resettlement.

"Elena," 40, is one of the workers at home with an ankle. She worked at Howard for two and a half years, and lost the tips of two fingers in an accident there.

"I'm here [in the United States] because of necessity," she says. She sends money to her sick mother in Mexico, and she is the sole caregiver of her U.S.-born grandson. If Elena is deported back to Coahuila, Mexico, she fears she won't be able to find a job because of her age and injury.

"In Mexico there are no opportunities to get work. And for single women like me, it is even harder," she says. "I don't know what I'll do."

So far no charges have been filed against Howard Industries, where a spokesman declined to comment. Alvarez-Montgomery says ICE will gather evidence about the company's practices based on interviews with immigrant detainees. If information of wrongdoing exists, he says the U.S. attorney's office in Jacksonville, Miss., could pursue criminal charges against the company.

Marie Thompson, director of the MPOWER workers' center in Morton, Miss., notes that Howard seems an unusual site for an immigration raid. She says ICE typically targets slaughterhouses, poultry operations and other workplaces that employ a majority of immigrants. Howard, by contrast, employs many white people, African Americans and Latino immigrants.

But Howard does share one trait with other factories that underwent major raids: ongoing strife over working condi-

tions—either in the form of union negotiations and organizing, or investigations into labor abuses.

Howard Industries is currently in contract negotiations with the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 1317 union. The local was demanding better pay and benefits. And in June, the federal government fined Howard \$123,000 for health and safety violations.

Alvarez-Montgomery says ICE cannot disclose how it decides where to prioritize enforcement. He says the Howard Industries investigation was triggered by a call from a union member and other factors that he said he could not discuss.

Thompson notes that MPOWER and churches are scrambling for donations to help feed families of the detainees and pay their utility bills. Many families have doubled and tripled up in houses, as they await the fate of their loved ones.

"No matter which side of the immigration issue you are on, we have a humanitarian emergency down here," says Thompson. "There's an entire state fearful of stepping out their doors." ■

Engineering Students Talk Trash

STUDENT MEMBERS OF Engineers Without Borders (EWB) at the University of Minnesota can be forgiven for talking trash these days: Their effort to turn garbage into economic opportunity for Haitians just earned them a \$25,000 advocacy award from Keen Footwear.

The student engineers are exploring a way to recycle thousands of used plastic water sachets littering the streets and beaches of Haiti, a culturally rich but materially destitute island country in the Caribbean. (Seventy-six percent of Haitians live on less than \$2 per day, and half of all Haitians suffer from malnutrition, according to the U.N. World Food Program.)

The students say they hope to use that plastic, in turn, to make composting toilets for urban families. If successful, the project could enhance sanitation, reduce pollution and, eventually, create jobs for Haitians.

"We're trying to take refuse and make it into something useful," says Nathan

Knutson, a second-year master's student in mechanical engineering. He says the recycling programs used in the United States use large-scale sorting, shredding and injection-molding machines—all of which use tremendous amounts of energy. In Haiti, the students want to make recycling small enough to be hand-operated.

"We've had [the idea of recycling] forever up here in the States," he says, "but the technology threshold hasn't been reached to make recycling a reality in Haiti."

The Haiti project consists of two collaborating groups. One group is exploring low-tech ways to re-melt and re-mold the plastic; the other is perfecting a prototypical composting toilet, to be made with the re-melted plastic.

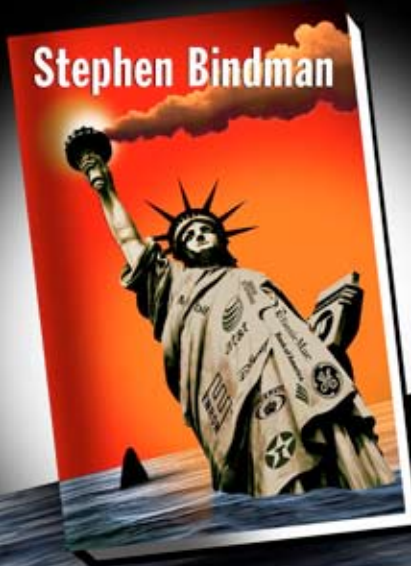
"It's a very basic, dry-composting indoor toilet system," says Lina Kelsaite-Fish, a senior civil engineering student.

A big question remains how to transport and use the resulting compost, since the toilets will be used in high-density neighborhoods in the northern city of Cap-Haïtien, 85 miles from the capital, Port-au-Prince.

PSEUDO-CAPITALISM SOCIALISM FOR THE RICH

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YOU GIVE, AFRICA SCORES

Thanks to Alive & Kicking, children across Africa have been given another “shot” at life.

Founded in 2004, this UK-based charity has mailed and sold more than 160,000 soccer balls, netballs and volleyballs, which have been delivered to every country in Africa, according to William Prochaska, a coordinator at Alive & Kicking. For 10 British pounds (\$18), people can donate a durable, repairable ball for less fortunate African children.

Prochaska says the organization’s goals extend beyond recreational enjoyment. Not only do these balls promote health awareness—with printed messages warning against the dangers of HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis—but the initiative also creates 150 jobs.

He says he has visited their operation countries before and calls the response “unbelievable.”

“[Alive & Kicking] offers something tangible and measurable,” Prochaska says. “Jobs in Africa, and skills training for the worst off, coupled with real balls for children is no mean feat. When you hold one of these balls in your hands, you immediately realize the quality of this project.”

The group’s most recent project, Balls Into Africa 2010, aims to donate 100,000 balls to some of the poorest children in sub-Saharan Africa in advance of the 2010 FIFA World Cup.

For more information or to donate, go to www.aliveandkicking.org.uk.

—Sara Suleiman



Haitian artists have long turned wood and cloth scraps into papier mache masks, and transformed discarded oil drums into metal sculptures called *fer de coupe*. Children make toys from found materials: small cars from film canisters, kites from plastic garbage bags. Students in the University of Minnesota’s EWB chapter hopes to tap into—and learn from—that ingenuity.

The water sachets—heavy plastic pouches—are made of high-density polyethylene (HDPE) plastic. Users typically bite the corner off to open them. Because it is not possible to reseal them, they are discarded after use. Municipal trash collection and recycling are nonexistent in Haiti.

The students are investigating the feasibility of melting the plastic in a solar-powered hot oil bath. They say they hope to use seed oil from the jatropha plant—a weedy vine native to Haiti that has high oil content and is non-corrosive and non-edible.

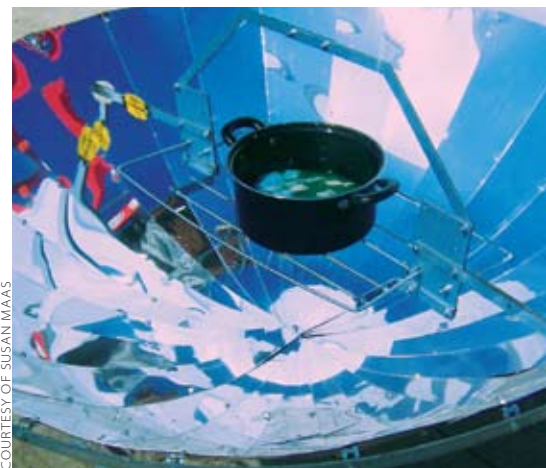
Kelsaite-Fish says one of the biggest challenges is learning how to apply the knowledge they gain at home in places where advantages don’t exist.

Member Chris Weyandt, a recent graduate in electrical engineering, agrees: “It’s learning about the people and the culture, and ... learning how we could successfully implement something like this and have it accepted by the people.”

The group had planned an exploratory trip to Haiti this summer, but EWB’s governing body postponed travel in the wake of Haiti’s food-shortage riots in April. The students say they hope to re-schedule the trip over winter break.

Founded in 2000 by a Colorado civil engineer, EWB-USA has more than 200 student and professional chapters around the country. The University of Minnesota chapter has worked on efforts from Ghana to Guatemala. The Haiti project group is partnering with Sustainable Organic Integrated Livelihoods (SOIL), a non-profit Haiti-based group.

“Engineering students like to know that they’re doing something useful, but often that’s the high-technology end of useful,” Knutson says. “What’s the next best technology: the smallest cell phone, the highest fuel efficiency? [T]hose things can help the environment and make life easier for many people, but there hasn’t



COURTESY OF SUSAN MAAS

Engineering students at the University of Minnesota are helping Haitians create solar reflectors with hot oil and plastic.

been a lot of exposure to service-learning engineering projects.”

Knutson says he and his peers are part of a new breed of engineers who are interested less in technology for its own sake and more in creative applications that benefit humankind. “I got an e-mail from a classmate who said, ‘That’s a cool project you guys are working on. I didn’t know engineering students did that.’”

—Susan Maas

‘Chicago Boys’ Home

IN THE WAKE of the massive Wall Street meltdown, laissez-faire economic theories seem increasingly quaint. But the University of Chicago wants to keep the flame of neoliberalism alive.

In May, the university announced plans to honor the late economist Milton Friedman by establishing the Milton Friedman Institute (MFI). Friedman—who died in 2006—taught at the University of Chicago from 1946 to 1976, and was one of the leading lights of the right-leaning “Chicago School” of economics.

However, more than 100 faculty members have signed a petition objecting to the MFI. The group of dissenting professors calls itself the Committee for Open Research on Economy and Society (CORES). CORES will make its case against the MFI at a faculty senate, a rarely held assembly of the entire faculty to be held this fall.

Yali Amit, a professor in the Departments of Statistics and Computer Science

and one of the petition's signers, cites several broad objections to the proposed institute. The most basic complaint involves the MFI's name. According to Amit, Friedman, the Nobel laureate and accomplished technical economist, "cannot be disentangled from Milton Friedman, the right-wing ideologue."

As an academic, Friedman promoted monetarism, a school of thought that advocates limiting the government's role in the economy to the central bank's control of the money supply. He also helped shape the current understanding of the relationship between inflation and unemployment, and the phenomenon known as stagflation—inflation plus stagnant economic growth. However, it was Friedman's career as a right-wing, anti-government pundit that made him renowned.

One of his main principles was that free-market capitalism is the handmaiden of liberal democracy. But the most famous implementation of Friedman's ideas occurred in Chile, under the jackboots of the brutal military dictatorship that seized power in 1973. Although he expressed perfunctory opposition to the regime's human rights abuses, Friedman met with its leader, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, and lectured in Chile during the years of oppressive military rule. Several prominent Friedmanites—known as the "Chicago Boys"—took key positions in the Pinochet government.

Friedman's association with Pinochet is one aspect of his career that troubles members of CORES. Many professors also fear that the MFI would resemble the Hoover Institution at Stanford University, a right-wing think tank attached to a respectable university. The Hoover has been the home to such questionably distinguished scholars as former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, Reagan-era Attorney General and Iran-Contra conspirator Ed Meese, and talk radio host Laura Ingraham.

"Anything that would even vaguely resemble the Hoover would be deeply troubling," says Bruce Lincoln, a professor of the history of religion at the Divinity School, and a vocal critic of the MFI.

The University of Chicago administration denies that the center's work will be ideological. But according to language in

the original proposal, "the intellectual focus of the institute would reflect the traditions of the Chicago School ... [including Friedman's] critical analysis of monetary policy, and his advocacy for market alternatives to ill-conceived policy initiatives."

A related concern is that the MFI could become a fundraising tool specifically targeting persons and institutions with a material interest in promoting Friedman's political agenda. The money for the proposed institute—a staggering \$200 million—is to be raised almost exclusively by corporations and wealthy individuals. According to the MFI's website, persons donating \$1 million will become lifelong members of the Milton Friedman Society and will "provide the Institute's scholars with connections to leaders in business and government."

Adding insult to injury, the Friedman Institute will occupy what is currently the Chicago Theological Seminary's historic main building. In a letter to the *University of Chicago Magazine*, an alumnus suggested that the institute might be re-christened the "Friedman Seminary for Divine Economics," since the neo-Gothic landmark will be trading one theology for another.

—Adrian Bleifuss Prados

GOP Dirty Tricks 2.0

IN JUNE, *THE Atlantic* magazine's Marc Ambinder reported that some people inside Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz.) presidential campaign were hoping to soften the GOP's traditionally aggressive campaign against "voter fraud," partly because they thought previous efforts had created a backlash in public opinion. But the next day, the campaign's top lawyer fired back, writing to Ambinder that "any impression that we're not committed to stopping voter fraud is 100 percent false."

Of course, federal officials have never found evidence of widespread voter fraud. But that hasn't stopped Republican operatives from exploiting fears of ballot security to build a nationwide campaign of laws, policies and flimsy challenges that ostensibly prevent fraud while actually limiting voting access for the nation's most marginalized citizens.

To be fair, many of the barriers Ameri-

cans face at the polls could stem less from partisan interference than from the enduring holes in the nation's election administration infrastructure. In two recent House subcommittee hearings, election officials from Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia cautioned that a lack of resources and trained poll workers would lead to delays and confusion at high-traffic polling sites.

Tova Wang, vice president for research at the nonprofit citizens' lobbying group Common Cause and co-author of a new report on voting access in 10 swing states,



The GOP in Macomb County, Mich., thinks a lost home should mean a lost vote.

says "Virginia is troubling. Turnout in Virginia might be huge, and it hasn't been a swing state before, so in some ways they haven't had a practice run."

But it won't solely be infrastructure issues that cause problems. Nationwide, conservatives have started an active campaign of voter caging and intimidation to suppress turnout. "I think there are signs that challenges will occur," says Wang. "The question is to what degree."

This cycle's most egregious example is taking place in Michigan, where James Carabelli, chairman of the Republican Party in Macomb County, told the independent, online daily *Michigan Messenger* in September that he will challenge the eligibility of voters who've been issued a home foreclosure notice.

Not only is the tactic illegal—receiving a foreclosure notice is not evidence that a person's address has changed—but it could be racially charged because a dispropor-

tionate number of the state's foreclosures affected African Americans and Latinos. More than 60 percent of all subprime loans in Michigan were made to black lenders.

In July, Doug Preisse, GOP chairman of Franklin County, Ohio, hinted he might do the same, claiming his party wants "clean, accurate voter lists."

Florida's GOP is sharpening its legislative attack, as well. State officials have resumed enforcement of a controversial "no match, no vote" policy, which denies registrants voting eligibility if the information they submit while registering does not match that in a government database. "This law means if there's some small variation in the way you put your name," says Wang, "you will not be registered."

In December 2007, a judge from the U.S. District Court of Northern Florida issued a temporary injunction against the verification law, which the state legislature first approved in 2005. In June, a federal court deemed the law legal, but Republican Secretary of State Kurt Browning waited until early September—just three weeks before

the end of voter registration—to reinstate the practice.

Wisconsin Attorney General J. B. Van Hollen (a McCain campaign co-chair) is trying to implement a similarly cumbersome law that would remove people from the voter rolls if the address on their registration forms does not match the one listed on their driver's license. He's also demanding that the state's Government Accountability Board retroactively run a database match on every voter registered since January 2006, despite virtually no evidence of voter fraud in the state.

Some election officials may also be misleading left-leaning populations about their rights. The local registrar in Montgomery County, Va.—home to Virginia Tech University and the site of a sizeable Obama voter registration drive—issued two press releases incorrectly suggesting that students who register to vote at their college could lose scholarships, their dependency status or coverage under their parents' car and health insurance.

Meanwhile, in Alabama, the state's GOP has pressured the Prisons Commissioner to halt a voter registration drive directed at inmates who had been convicted of drug possession, even though a 2005 Alabama attorney general's opinion deemed them eligible to vote.

While President Bush's Department of Justice keeps its focus on voter fraud cases, the Obama campaign is fighting back. In September, the campaign filed suit in federal court to prevent the foreclosure gambit, calling it "a new and especially repellent version of caging."

They've also rolled out the most comprehensive voter protection campaign ever, enlisting thousands of lawyers to ensure that registered voters make it on the rolls, ballots are available and polls stay open.

Shannon Gilson, a spokeswoman for the Obama campaign, says, "We will have the resources to protect the right of every eligible voter to cast a ballot and have it counted."

—Adam Doster

appall-o-meter

2.2 The Politics of Meaninglessness

You gotta love PETA. When all the institutions in American politics seem so broken and compromised; when everybody seems to be out to make a buck off their brother; when everything seems to be nothing but a means to an end, People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals stands out as pure, unalloyed, uncompromising champion of pointlessness.

In August, according to the *Chicago Tribune*, PETA made an offer to U.S. Customs and Border Protection to buy ad space on the wall being built along the U.S.-Mexico border. The message: "If the border patrol doesn't get you, the chicken and burgers will. Go vegan."

"We just wanted Mexicans and other immigrants to know that, if they cross into the United States, they're putting their health at risk by leaving behind healthier stable diets of corn, tortillas, fruits, vegetables, beans and rice," a spokeswoman told the *Tribune*.

Now comes word that PETA sent a letter to the founders of the Ben & Jerry's

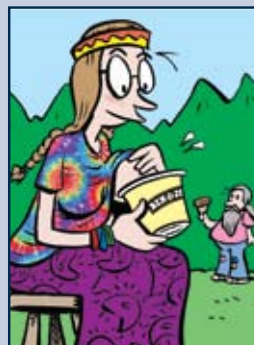
ice cream empire, urging them to switch from using cow's milk to human milk to make their product.

"The fact that human adults consume huge quantities of dairy products made from milk that was meant for a baby cow just doesn't make sense," said a PETA executive. "Everyone knows that 'the breast is best,' so Ben & Jerry's could do consumers and cows a big favor by making the switch to breast milk."

Maybe border-hopping women of childbearing age could be diverted from slaughterhouse work to wet-nursing sweatshops in Vermont. Groovy!

Ben and Jerry wrote back: "We applaud PETA's novel approach to bringing attention to an issue, but we believe a mother's milk is best used for her child."

Translation: We're amazed that PETA continues to siphon off so much surplus wealth from clueless trustafarians, but stay the freak away from us, you freakin' freaks!



4.3 Don't Tread On Me!

A Wisconsin man received a citation at the Fond du Lac County Fair for buying a beer for his underage sons. "I need two beers," the man told a woman working the beer tent, according to the *Fond du Lac Reporter*. "One for me and one for my 4-year-old son."

The woman thought he was joking until he handed the beer to the tyke. Apparently his 2-year-old had a sip as well.

It being Wisconsin, this was perfectly legal. Underage children by law are allowed to drink with their parents. The trouble started when a cop told the man that the kids were too young to understand what they were drinking or to refuse it.

It being Wisconsin, the man began hollering and cussing at this infringement of his right to raise his offspring as Wisconsinites.

—Dave Mulcahey

Framing the 'RNC 8' snapshot

ST. PAUL, MINN.—THE city that became a battlefield between police and protesters, who took to the streets during the Republican National Convention (RNC) in early September, is now embroiled in a new fight—a legal battle over freedom of speech and assembly.

In an unprecedented application of Minnesota's version of the federal Patriot Act, eight members of the RNC Welcoming Committee, an anarchist organization, each face up to seven and a half years in prison for charges of "conspiracy to riot in furtherance of terrorism" for their alleged roles in RNC protest activities.

The charges against the eight individuals, now known as "The RNC 8," follow a yearlong investigation in which the Ramsey County Sheriff's Department, with the help of state and federal agencies, used an undercover agent and two paid informants to infiltrate and collect information on the organization.

On Aug. 30 and 31, the weekend preceding the RNC, the investigation culminated in a series of preemptive raids on several homes in the Twin Cities that the American Civil Liberties Union and the National Lawyer's Guild (NLG) have condemned.

"The scariest thing about this is that no one is accused of actually doing anything, they have been charged with conspiring," says attorney Jordon Kushner, an NLG member who is representing defendant Luce Guillen Givins. "What is worse is they are labeling people advocating traditional civil disobedience as terrorists. In my opinion, the intent of this is to stifle people's desires to exercise their First Amendment rights."

According to the sheriff department's application for a search warrant, authorities initiated an investigation on Aug. 29, 2007. Based on publicly available information on the organization, police determined there was "reasonable suspicion" that the RNC Welcoming Committee was planning to engage in "criminal activity" in the days leading up to, and during, the RNC.

During the course of the investigation, agents placed the RNC Welcoming Committee under surveillance and infiltrated the group. The preemptive raids were ex-



BANGKOK, THAILAND—Sangworn, a *mahout* (elephant driver), stands with Bussaba, his 13-year-old elephant, at a temporary camp on Sept. 26. Though Thai officials have passed laws banning elephants from roadways, *mahouts* say that they must risk fines and bring their elephants to major cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai in order to survive. (Photo Paula Bronstein/Getty Images)

ecuted on "probable cause" derived from informants' claims that the homes contained incendiary and explosive devices, as well as allegations that members had discussed kidnapping delegates and sabotaging airports.

During the raids, police seized property and jailed eight alleged leaders of the RNC Welcoming Committee. They were not charged until Sept. 3, the day before the convention ended. The second-degree conspiracy to riot charge carries a maximum five-year penalty, however, the additional state Patriot Act charge of "furtherance of terrorism" allows for a 50 percent increase in the maximum penalty.

In a Sept. 3 statement, president of the Minnesota Chapter of the NLG, Bruce Nestor, who was at the scene of the raids, said police found no evidence of incendiary or bomb-making materials, and instead seized common household items such as computers, paint and hatchets for chopping wood, among other things. Nestor also noted that allegations that the anarchists intended to kidnap or sabotage

airports came from paid informants.

"Based on past abuses of such informants by law enforcement, the National Lawyer's Guild is concerned that such police informants have incentives to lie and exaggerate threats of violence and to also act as provocateurs in raising and urging support for acts of violence," the statement said.

Givins, one of the RNC 8, says she wasn't surprised police cracked down on protesters, but believes the nature of the arrests has serious implications.

"If the police are able to preemptively shut down dissent, people will be afraid to have even simple political meetings," she says.

Kushner says he fears a return to '60s-style police infiltration of radical groups.

"We haven't seen this kind of police activity since the Chicago 8," he says, referring to the arrest of eight organizers during the 1968 Democratic National Convention in Chicago. "What has happened with these criminal charges is very extreme and dangerous because people are being prosecuted for political reasons."

—Sam Stoker

BY SUSAN J. DOUGLAS

The End of Aggressive Ignorance?



HOW SURREAL IS life right now? Between a right-wing, government-loathing president insisting on bringing socialism to Wall Street, a Chatty Cathy doll (Remember those? You pulled a cord and they said the same five things) running for vice president, polls showing that still—still!—people give McCain the edge on national security issues. And the TV

pundits, against overwhelming evidence to the contrary, claim that the first presidential debate was “a tie.” You start to feel like you’ve shot down that rabbit hole with Alice and may never get out. I mean, really, the country seems to have gone crazy.

Nevertheless, there is a war being waged now, in the waning days of the Bush administration and the campaign, against the triumph of aggressive ignorance, a fabulous term I’m stealing from my nephew.

Aggressive ignorance defiantly shoves its utter lack of knowledge in your face and brays: “Facts? We don’t need no stinkin’ facts!” Team Bush has repeatedly asserted that it didn’t need to know much of anything—about Iraq, hurricane relief, science, global climate change or the corruptions of the financial sector, and that we shouldn’t know anything about these things either.

McCain and Palin—the Dumb and Dumber ticket—have elevated aggressive ignorance to new levels. McCain, with his bone-headed assertions about the strength of the economy, not knowing Sunnis from Shiites, maintaining he hadn’t read the proposed bailout legislation he was swooping into Washington to vote on, and Sarah Palin with ... well, where to start?

Already her insistence that “you can see Russia from Alaska” establishes her foreign policy bona fides, and her conjuring the image of Russian leader Vladimir Putin’s head flying over her home state have become howlers.

Who have been the white knights in the battle against aggressive ignorance, aside from Obama, who himself is banking on the hunch that maybe people have had enough of *Jackass* politics? Well, not necessarily who you might think. And it’s been mostly women (although, so far, not Hillary).

It took Katie Couric, the nightly CBS News anchor

widely dismissed as having the least gravitas (and the lowest ratings), to expose Palin as the syntactically challenged, gibberish-spouting dunce that she is.

But Couric isn’t the only gyno-American who isn’t having any of this. CNN’s Campbell Brown, in a statement that didn’t get nearly enough attention given the bailout psycho-drama, charged the McCain campaign with sexism for sequestering Palin from the news media as if she were a fragile flower too weak and delicate to take the heat of reporters’ questions.

Can you imagine what would have happened if Dan Quayle (whom Palin is starting to make look like Disraeli) had been similarly locked in the powder room?

And “Saturday Night Live” alum Tina Fey has been pitch perfect in her assault on Palin’s perky ignorance.

And then there’s David Letterman, outraged that McCain would think he was so dumb that he would not discover that McCain had cancelled on him, claiming he had to rush back to Congress, only

to be down the block getting powder-puffed for an interview with CBS colleague Couric.

And what about everyday Americans? Yes, we saw a lot of them in September, swarming to McCain-Palin events, swooning over Paw and the self-styled Daisy Mae.

But after the first presidential debate, many (especially women) repudiated the pundits who repeatedly claimed the debate was “a draw,” or that Obama had not really won.

McCain looked, simultaneously, like he was a nervous wreck and on Xanax. He barely answered most of the questions. He could barely pronounce “Ahmadinejad,” the name of Iran’s leader. When he flashed that rodent-like smile, he was truly scary. He lectured Obama about not knowing the difference between a tactic and a strategy, and then suggested that “the surge” was the latter instead of the former. And when Obama recited the list of everything he’d gotten wrong about Iraq, Obama whupped him.

So it was heartening the next morning to get up and see that, unlike the pundits, every poll showed viewers giving the victory to Obama.

Aggressive ignorance has been in the driver’s seat for a long time and we’re so used to it we can’t remember what intelligence, information and common sense might be like in the White House. But the indications are, at least as of this writing, that we’ve had enough. ■

Everyday Americans saw a lot of McCain and Palin in September, swooning over Paw and the self-styled Daisy Mae.

BY SALIM MUWAKKIL

An Exemplar of Reconciliation



ALMOST UNNOTICED, IMAM W.D. Mohammed died of heart disease and diabetes on Sept. 9 in his modest home in a Chicago suburb. His death received scant attention, which may have reflected Mohammed's aversion to the spotlight, but it was hardly commensurate with his significance.

Mohammed was one of the nation's most influential Islamic clerics and strongest advocates of ecumenical unity, urging stronger links between Christians, Jews and Muslims. His Quranic rigor earned the respect of Islamic scholars worldwide, and he was a passionate American patriot.

What's more, he was a potent influence on the African-American freedom movement, challenging the racial essentialism that rose during the Black Power era and transforming a black nationalist cult into a group advocating racial unity.

Mohammed offered a model of reconciliation on two important fronts: Islamic piety with Western pluralism and U.S. patriotism with black activism. His example provided a lesson for a world struggling with clashing sensibilities, and his passing hurts prospects for progress.

He was born Wallace Delaney Muhammad on Oct. 30, 1933, to Clara Muhammad and the late Elijah Muhammad, leader of the Nation of Islam. When his father died in 1975, Wallace was selected to lead the black supremacist group.

This choice surprised many. Wallace was a rebellious son who had been expelled from the group several times for public apostasy. He was also temperamentally introverted and soft-spoken, seemingly ill suited to lead such a messianic organization. Most observers expected Louis Farrakhan, Elijah's charismatic national representative, to succeed him.

Nevertheless, within his first year of leadership, Wallace repudiated the most distinctive element of the group's peculiar catechism: its eugenic theology. White people were no longer said to be the personification of evil, grafted from superior black people through a eugenic process. He eschewed the belief in an anthropomorphic God who "came in the person of Master Fard Muhammad."

Elijah's son began phasing out the group's black nationalist ideology, its paramilitary style of organization and its bour-

geois capitalist business model. Some likened him to a mass deprogrammer who lifted the veil of fanaticism.

At the time, the Nation of Islam was the most formidable organization in the black community. Under Elijah, the group ran its own schools, stores, farms and newspaper plant, and it urged black people to distance themselves—at least psychologically—from white America.

While black nationalist ideology ascended, other activist groups sputtered, leaving the Nation of Islam as the most prominent exemplar of the black power ideal. Farrakhan, based in New York, was attracting huge crowds nationwide.

Wallace stopped that momentum and brought the Nation of Islam into theological accord with the tenets of Sunni orthodoxy. Remarkably, he engineered this major

transformation without the bloody succession struggles many predicted would follow Elijah Muhammad's death.

In 1976, Mohammed changed the name of the group to the World Com-

munity of al-Islam in the West, and again changed it to the American Muslim Mission two years later. When he resigned in 2003, his group was the American Society of Muslims.

Through all these name changes, he retained the allegiance of tens of thousands of African-American Muslims who were attracted to his unique Quranic interpretations, his inclusive social message and his humble personal style.

He had his enemies, however. Mohammed's enthusiastic patriotism angered many who believed that the country's racist traditions made it unworthy of black people's allegiance. Many condemned him for embracing orthodox Islam and for rejecting black nationalism in favor of integration.

Farrakhan initially went along with the theological changes wrought by his late leader's son, but soon left to revive the moribund Nation of Islam. The two went in separate directions, occasionally differing over religious fine points and racial ideology. They officially reconciled in 2000, and Farrakhan has slowly moved the race-focused Nation of Islam closer to the Islamic orthodoxy Mohammed espoused.

Mohammed's value as an Islamic scholar and religious ambassador overshadowed his role in the black freedom movement. He challenged the notion that black supremacy was an appropriate response to white supremacy, and in doing so he changed the face of black activism. ■

Some likened Mohammed to a mass deprogrammer who lifted the veil of fanaticism and black nationalism from thousands of acolytes.

DROPPIN' A DIME

BY LAURA S. WASHINGTON

Honest Abe and Honest Obe



ABRAM LINCOLN WILL rise again.

At least that's what Democratic presidential nominee Barack Obama would like you to believe. Since 2005, when he penned an homage to Lincoln for *Time* magazine, the senator from Illinois has been peddling the notion that he is the rightful heir to the Lincoln legend, as rail splitter, rhetorical extraordinaire, debater and liberator.

In February 2007, when Obama kicked off his historic campaign in Springfield, Ill., he told the throngs he had returned to his Illinois State Senate stomping grounds to stand "in the shadow of the Old State Capitol, where Lincoln once called on a house divided to stand together." He continued: "By ourselves, this change will not happen. Divided, we are bound to fail. ... But the life of a tall, gangly, self-made Springfield lawyer tells us that a different future is possible."

That tall, gangly and little-known state senator rode his oratory skills and cerebral wisdom to the White House in 1860. Lincoln took the nation's reins in a singular time of crisis and made history by holding the nation together and forging the Emancipation Proclamation.

The nation is once again in crisis. The slick message: Obama is the new Lincoln.

Obama tried the analogy again last month when he returned to Lincoln Land to launch Sen. Joe Biden (D-Del.) as his vice presidential pick. Throughout the campaign, he has peppered his talks on the trail with references to Honest Abe.

It has been risky. Obama's conservative critics slammed his comparisons as "messianic," full of "conceit" and "ego-maniacal."

Charges of hubris aside, the Obama-Lincoln parallel is a hard sell. Many historians consider Lincoln our greatest president. But when it comes to history, the average American voter has the memory of a goldfish. My friend Studs Terkel calls our nation the "United States of Alzheimer's."

It doesn't help that the Obama has cherry-picked the Lincoln legacy. Lincoln's greatest act was signing two ex-

ecutive orders—in 1862 and 1863—to free the slaves. You won't hear Obama talk as much about that.

For most of his presidential quest, Obama has run away from race. That's why he couldn't bring himself to utter the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s name during his nomination acceptance speech on Aug. 28 in Denver. That's why he keeps "race men," like the Revs. Jesse Jackson Jr. and Al Sharpton, at arm's length. That's why his campaign has stepped gingerly around issues like profiling, urban crime, gun control and reparations.

See no black people. Hear no black people. Speak no black people.

So far, it seems to be working.

Nevertheless, Obama should find a way to embrace

**Obama has run away from race.
That's why his campaign has stepped
gingerly around issues like profiling,
urban crime and gun control.**

the Lincoln motif and work it hard, says Richard Norton Smith, the distinguished American historian and founding director of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Library and Museum

in Springfield. Obama can dodge the messiah rap, says Smith, now a scholar-in-residence at George Mason University, who regularly opines on presidential history for PBS's "NewsHour with Jim Lehrer."

"I would distinguish between holding up the Lincoln example as finding inspiration, rather than equating oneself with Lincoln," Smith says.

In fact, one of Lincoln's most eloquent moments came during the harrowed debate over slavery. In 1862, during the run-up to the Emancipation Proclamation, Lincoln sent this message to Congress: "The occasion is piled high with difficulty and we must rise with the occasion. As our case is new, so we must think anew and act anew. We must disenthrall ourselves and then we will save our country."

Methinks this is the right "occasion."

We are mired in a disastrous and un-winnable war. The U.S. economic system may be on the brink of a depression. Mr. Change is claiming to be a new kind of politician who can pull us out of partisan politics to finally deal with the big stuff. Let's get to it.

"The Lincoln story continues to haunt us to this day," Smith said, "because of the potential, the possibility of a (new kind of) politics that he brought to the office."

Can Obama rise to the occasion? ■



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The Races to Watch

Democrats vie to capitalize on House and Senate vacancies

BY HANS JOHNSON

WHEN CONTROL OF THE House and Senate flipped narrowly to Democrats following the 2006 elections, many Republicans tried to keep a brave face. They banked on 2008 as a year of change—which is exactly what it is shaping up to be, though not in the way the minority party had hoped. Rather than wresting away the speaker's gavel from Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), House GOP leader John Boehner (Ohio) faces more losses in his ranks.

A stark imbalance in retiring incumbents—a margin of 28 Republicans to six Democrats among a total of 435 House seats—leaves Pelosi and her party with pickup opportunities in the newly vacated slots.

The retirement trend—equally salient in the Senate, where all five exits afflict the GOP—isn't the only dynamic benefiting Democrats. The unraveling of the Bush administration, as it limps to its final curtain through a recession, a financial meltdown and a sixth year of war in Iraq (and the eighth year in Afghanistan), is a drag on Republican candidates in many states and districts. As a result, the question is not whether Democrats will gain seats in either chamber, but how many they will gain in each.

Donors and dollars

Based on financial reports through August 2008, Democrats head to Election Day boasting advantages in their war chests. In the House, the margin is \$54 million to \$14 million over the GOP. In the Senate, the margin is \$34 million to \$27 million over the GOP.



From left to right: Ashwin Madia, Mike McMahon and Linda Stender

Compared with earlier election cycles—in which overwhelming Republican resources forced Democrats to marshal money for a tight cluster of targeted races—the dollar superiority this year affords Democrats the chance to compete in more districts. They can do what political strategists call “expand the playing field”—challenging GOP candidates even in districts that ordinarily lean their way.

Democrats plan to purchase \$53 million of advertising in 51 congressional districts, according to congressional analyst Stuart Rothenberg. This amounts to a two-fold expansion over 2006, when the public's strong anti-incumbent, anti-Republican sentiments netted Democrats 30 new seats, including some unanticipated victories.

Heavier voter turnout in presidential elections tends to yield a return of some marginal seats to the party traditionally dominant in that area. Still, Democrats' combination of resources and an expanded playing field are likely to lead to an overall gain of several seats.

Three other factors have a significant bearing on congressional races this year: momentum, context and changes in the electorate. None of these dynamics holds much consolation for Republicans.

Expanding the field—and the electorate

Since March, Democrats have won three special elections for Congress in districts that Republicans had represented for decades.

One was the northern Illinois seat of former GOP House Speaker Dennis Hastert. He resigned midterm only to see the seat he had held for 21 years go to Democrat Bill Foster, who took full advantage of an endorsement from home-state senator and presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama.

The results of the other two special elections—in Louisiana and Mississippi in May—were early indicators that Obama exerts a strong pull on all types of Democrats, as well as on many independents and moderate Republicans. In both contests, GOP allies sought to boost their candidates by playing on racism in linking the Democratic candidates to Obama. Both attempts fell flat. The Democrats prevailed, pushing their party's total margin in the House to 38 votes, or a difference of 19 seats.

Throughout the primary season, Obama staff and volunteers have attempted to add thousands of new Democrats to the voter rolls through carefully structured registration drives. In the fast-growing swing state of Nevada, for instance, this effort has helped give Democrats their first major edge in overall registration in a generation.

And in Pennsylvania, according to the *Harrisburg Patriot-News*, Democrats added more than 98,000 new registrants, while Republicans added 289 since the state's April primary. During that same period, more than 45,000 voters re-registered as Democrats, while only 17,000 switched to the GOP. As Chris Hayes of *The Nation* has reported, such efforts build on Obama's experience as an organizer and voter-registration activist and have a potentially far-reaching effect.

The country has roughly 170 million registered voters and about 55 million unregistered, eligible voters. By the time pre-election registration ends in many states in early October, there may be as many as 5 million new voters this year.

In swing state New Mexico, left-leaning organizations have taken the lead in signing up new voters. Such efforts could be pivotal. In 2004, Patricia Madrid—a progressive hero as attorney general for single-handedly striking down a divisive statewide anti-gay ballot measure that would have cost millions to fight—lost a

House race against incumbent Heather Wilson by only 861 votes. And Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) lost to President Bush in the state by fewer than 6,100 votes.

This year, despite a state law restricting coordinated voter registration, more than 65,000 new voters have signed up in New Mexico. All three House seats and a Senate seat are up for grabs. And if the national race is close, the state's five electoral votes may decide the presidency.

TOP 12 RACES TO WATCH IN THE HOUSE

Seats vacated by retiring Republican incumbents

The theme of corruption that Democrats hammered two years ago to gain majorities in both chambers has lost some of its bang on the campaign trail. This season, rumbles from the shaky economy provide the background noise. Still, scandal-related departures by long-serving GOP representatives account for three of the top 12 House openings, and one of the top four Senate prospects that Democrats are poised to exploit this election.

★ 1. California's 4th District

In this Republican-leaning northeast California district—stretching from the Oregon and Nevada borders down to the suburbs of Sacramento—Democrats are closing in on one of the biggest upsets.

The retirement of nine-term Republican John Doolittle—stung by accusations that his wife collected commission on contributions to his campaign and facing an investigation in connection with disgraced lobbyist Jack Abramoff—created an opening for second-time candidate **Charlie Brown**. The retired Air Force pilot has championed veterans' issues.

Although Brown narrowly lost to Doolittle in 2006, he rides into this election against a divided GOP. State Sen. Tom McClintock, a former candidate for state controller and favorite of the far right, edged former Rep. Doug Ose, a Republican moderate, in the June primary. McClintock, a vociferous foe of state spending from a southern California district, has been dogged by allega-

tions that he took more than \$300,000 in taxpayer-funded per-diems for lodging expenses while actually living up north near the state capital.

★ 2. Illinois' 11th District

This central Illinois district, ex-urban home to Chicago emigres and a growing Latino population, has lost its sharp GOP tendencies in recent elections. And the retirement of seven-term Republican incumbent Jerry Weller amid corruption allegations over unreported land holdings in Central America has left an opportunity for Democrats.

Marquee candidate and state Senate majority leader **Debbie Halvorson** faces Martin Ozinga, owner of a concrete company. Ozinga, who has faced fallout from a turf battle with an elderly local landowner displaced by his firm, has allied himself with Republican presidential candidate Sen. John McCain (Ariz.) in advocating expanded drilling, including in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Halvorson, who prioritizes expansion of healthcare coverage, enjoys support from Emily's List, the campaign training and funding source for pro-choice Democratic women.

★ 3. Minnesota's 3rd District

Few districts showcase the changing face and political leanings of American suburbs better than this one, on the western outskirts of Minneapolis. **Ashwin Madia**, a former Marine and son of Indian-American immigrants, seized the opportunity furnished by the retirement of nine-term moderate Republican Jim Ramstad.

Madia made waves this spring with a spirited campaign for the DFL (Democratic-Farmer-Labor) Party nomination that targeted and won over local Democrats and sidelined Democratic challengers. He faces Erik Paulsen, a GOP state legislator and longtime Ramstad aide.

Madia served as a Marine prosecutor and legal adviser in Iraq, and later advised a torture victim pressing for asylum in the United States. He thus has firsthand knowledge of two of the foremost moral issues defining the Bush legacy and framing the agenda of the next Congress.



From left to right: Martin Heinrich, Alice Kryzan and Mary Jo Kilroy

★ 4. New York's 13th District

This district, covering Staten Island and a part of Brooklyn, one of the only urban seats in the nation held by a Republican, became a Democratic pickup opportunity rather suddenly this spring. Vito Fossella, the six-term incumbent, announced his retirement following a drunk-driving arrest in Virginia while on a visit to a daughter he had fathered out of wedlock and not previously disclosed.

Mike McMahon, a New York City council member with expertise on waste, recycling and alternative energy, elbowed aside a challenger in the September primary. He enjoys support from labor, environmental groups and Mayor Michael Bloomberg. In the Nov. 4 matchup, McMahon will face Robert Straniere, a former Republican member of the state Assembly and now owner of a Manhattan hot-dog restaurant.

★ 5. Virginia's 11th District

Fairfax County, with the highest average household income in the nation, sits in northern Virginia, just west of Washington, D.C. Once a Republican stronghold, it has grown steadily more Democratic in the past decade.

The retirement of seven-term incumbent Tom Davis has left **Gerry Connolly**

in the driver's seat for this Democratic pickup. Connolly is in his second term as chair of the Fairfax County board of commissioners and faces Keith Fimian, founder of a residential and commercial property-inspection company.

Because polls close early in Virginia, at 7 p.m. on Election Day, this seat may be one of the earliest indicators on Election Night of overall trends in the balloting.

★ 6. New Jersey's 3rd District

In a district snaking from the Jersey Shore inland to the Delaware River and the Philadelphia exurb of Cherry Hill, Democrats sense another pickup opportunity. Following his announcement of prostate cancer, Republican Jim Saxton will retire after 12 terms. Vying to keep the seat in GOP hands is Medford town mayor Chris Myers, a Navy veteran of the first Gulf War and a vice president at Lockheed Martin, the defense contractor.

Longtime Democratic state Sen. **John Adler** has parlayed robust fundraising and a nearly nine-to-one edge in available cash to brand Myers as a foot-soldier of conservative ideology. Adler's record includes bills to facilitate absentee voting by military personnel and students and access by consumers to medication at pharmacies without discrimination. He enjoys endorsements from the Teamsters

and NARAL-ProChoice America.

★ 7. New Jersey's 7th District

State Rep. **Linda Stender** hopes this fall to win the seat that barely eluded her two years ago. The retirement of Republican Mike Ferguson, who beat Stender by fewer than 3,000 votes last time, has made her goal more achievable. Again giving Stender a boost is Emily's List, the national fundraising powerhouse that trains and touts pro-choice Democratic women candidates. She faces Leonard Lance, a second-term state senator.

Stender gained national traction in 2006 for defending New Jersey widows of men killed in 9/11 against personal attacks by right-wing attack dog Ann Coulter. With evidence mounting that Stender was poised to knock off the incumbent, she then faced a barrage of eleventh-hour GOP attacks playing on her last name and calling her a reckless "spender."

This time, however, Republicans are not as well-marshaled. Conservatives in New Jersey's 3rd and 7th districts have struggled to close ranks following divisive fights in the primary. This factor may give both Stender and Adler an advantage.

★ 8. New Mexico's 1st District

Republicans have seen their grip on this Albuquerque-based district steadily slip away in the 10 years that incumbent Heather Wilson has held it. Her reported involvement in the firing of U.S. Attorney David Iglesias amid partisan pressure and retaliation helped make Iglesias a reluctant poster child for the Bush administration's abuses of power. Those revelations, and Wilson's response to them, also helped sink her primary campaign for the Senate.

Enter **Martin Heinrich**, member of the Albuquerque city council, with a background in land-use issues, human service and nonprofit advocacy. He faces Republican Darren White, the sheriff of Bernalillo County, in this hard-fought race. Heinrich brandished his appointment by Gov. Bill Richardson to head the Office of Natural Resources Trustee to prevail with 44 percent of the ballots in a crowded Democratic primary against candidates with better name recognition. He will

need even more of that moxie to win the general election against White.

★ 9. New York's 25th District

Republican Jim Walsh had seen his Election-Night majorities in this Syracuse-based district grow ever more precarious in the course of his 10 terms. His departure this year opens the door to **Dan Maffei**, a former local news reporter and member of the Communications Workers of America, and current director at a capital-management firm. The Democrat faces Dale Sweetland, a Republican with a background in agribusiness and now an insurance agent.

★ 10. New York's 26th District

It is a rare member of Congress who departs voluntarily after only five terms. But Tom Reynolds fell on hard political times. He had to fight to exonerate himself from colleagues' blame for the Mark Foley page scandal, despite his senior aide's early efforts to blow the whistle on the former congressman. And buck-passing for heavy GOP losses in the midterm election also stopped at the desk of the Rochester Republican, who managed his party's congressional campaign message and fundraising in 2004 and 2006. Then there was the embezzlement of up to \$1 million from the committee coffers that Reynolds oversaw.

Seeking the vacant seat are Democrat **Alice Kryzan** and Republican Christopher Lee. Kryzan, an environmental attorney, pulled off a political shocker in the sparsely attended September primary, besting progressive favorite Jon Powers by 1,300 votes, as well as beating three-time candidate Jack Davis. Powers, who remains on the general-election ballot on the Working Families line, outspent Kryzan by more than a three-to-one margin.

Even as she squares off against Lee, president of an automation company, Kryzan is a reminder that contending for Congress is not solely a rich man's game.

★ 11. Ohio's 15th District

Franklin County Commissioner and attorney **Mary Jo Kilroy** hopes to win her second bid for this seat, representing

a central Ohio district that stretches west from downtown Columbus. Incumbent Rep. Deborah Pryce only narrowly held off Kilroy's challenge in 2006 and, after eight terms, is seeking to pass the baton to state Sen. Steve Stivers. A former banking lobbyist, Stivers is a national guardsman and veteran of the war in Iraq. His formidable bid means that the same coalition of labor, environmental and pro-choice groups that ginned up votes for Kilroy last time must leave no stone unturned for her to prevail in this race.

★ 12. Wyoming At-Large

The fact that the state's lone seat in the House—once held by Vice President Dick Cheney—may now be claimed by a Democrat is another indicator of how far GOP stock has sunk this year.

Gary Trauner came within about 1,000 votes of beating Republican Rep. Barbara Cubin in 2006. His renewed challenge gave the six-term incumbent an extra nudge into retirement. Trauner, a pro-gun and pro-conservation Democrat, boasts pro-business credentials, having founded cell-phone and Internet companies in the state. He faces former state treasurer Cynthia Lummis, who is embraced by anti-abortion groups.

FOUR OTHER RACES TO WATCH (not open seats):

- Colorado's 4th: **Betsy Markey** is closing in on what two earlier challengers in three prior races could not quite achieve: the ouster of Rep. Marilyn Musgrave. Once rated the most conservative member of Congress, the three-term Republican earned the nickname "one-trick pony" for her sponsorship and grand-standing around an amendment to the U.S. Constitution to eliminate and outlaw the freedom to marry for committed same-sex couples.

Markey, a computer-security expert in the Reagan-era State Department and founder of a software firm, brings a blend of public service and business experience to the race. She also chaired the board of a food bank in the district,

which covers the eastern third of the state. A late-summer survey showed local independents hungry for a change in Congress and siding with Markey.

- Florida's 13th: **Christine Jennings** is mounting a rematch with Rep. Vern Buchanan. The Republican's 2006 victory by 369 votes has been haunted by the apparent disappearance of up to 17,000 votes on touch-screen machines in Sarasota. Jennings carried the city overall and argued first for a new election and later for a full investigation. Buchanan retained the seat, which in a freakish bit of historical congruence, had been held for two terms by 2000 Florida recount antagonist Katherine Harris.
- Idaho's 1st: **Walt Minnick** faces Republican Rep. Bill Sali. Ordinarily implausible for a Democrat, an upset in this district stretching from the Boise suburbs north through the state's panhandle remains feasible given voters' low regard for the incumbent. Sali represents a state that is nearly one-quarter Mormon, but he made headlines in 2007 for suggesting that members of minority faiths have no place in Congress and that such office-holders might somehow offend the Founding Fathers—who, he seems to have forgotten, wrote the First Amendment's guarantee of religious freedom.
- Michigan's 7th: **Mark Schauer** faces GOP Rep. Tim Walberg in south-central Michigan. Like Sali, Walberg won a deeply divisive primary and a first term in 2006 with help from the right-wing Club for Growth, whose hatred of regulation rivals only its contempt for moderate Republicans. Amid rising household debt stemming in part from costly acute-care for those without insurance, Walberg has drawn anger for suggesting that no one lacks healthcare coverage, since emergency rooms are open to everyone. Leadership like this has prompted at least one former Republican official in the district to switch parties and endorse Schauer. For the incumbent to lose, such crossover voters will prove crucial.



From left to right: Mark Udall, Jeanne Shaheen and Mark Warner

TOP FOUR RACES TO WATCH IN THE SENATE

All seats held by Republicans

★ 1. Alaska

Anchorage Mayor **Mike Begich** challenges seven-term incumbent Ted Stevens, the longest-serving Republican in the Senate. Stevens prevailed against a primary challenger in August but was standing trial—as *In These Times* went to press—for allegedly breaking a federal ethics law by failing to report improvements on his home performed by a campaign donor. GOP governor and vice presidential candidate Gov. Sarah Palin has kept her distance from Stevens. As the state inquiry continues into possible abuses of power from her own involvement in the termination of a state law-enforcement official, Palin's name at the top of the ticket will not exert the bipartisan pull she previously had in the state. This dynamic will benefit both Begich and the Democratic candidate for the state's lone House seat, **Ethan Berkowitz**. He is also relying on an anti-corruption message in seeking to oust 17-term incumbent Don Young.

★ 2. Colorado

The retirement of two-term incumbent Republican Wayne Allard leaves an opening that Rep. **Mark Udall** is angling to fill.

He faces former Rep. Bob Schaffer, who has staked his campaign on continuing Bush's tax cuts and expanded drilling. Udall continues his family's legendary tradition of environmentalism. He has vigorous backing from union members, earned in part from his sponsorship of the Employee Free Choice Act, which aims to level the playing field in union elections by penalizing employers who intimidate workers or stonewall attempts to bargain.

Udall's cousin came to Congress alongside him in 1998 and might also join him in the Senate. **Tom Udall**, two years older and one state to the south in **New Mexico**, is seeking to fill the seat of retiring six-term incumbent GOP Sen. Pete Domenici and leads in his race against Republican Rep. Steve Pearce.

★ 3. New Hampshire

Former Gov. **Jeanne Shaheen** lost a close race to John Sununu six years ago in an election tainted by a phone-jamming scandal orchestrated by Republican operatives that crippled a Democratic turnout effort for several hours on Election Day. Since the peak of GOP fortunes that year, no state features a more dramatic change in political representation. Shaheen's party now holds the governorship (which, like Vermont, has only a two-year term), the majority of the executive council, both House seats and both chambers of the

once-overwhelmingly Republican legislature. The challenge of claiming one of the state's two GOP-held Senate seats now belongs to Shaheen.

In 2000, with public schools facing massive cuts, Shaheen earned kudos for becoming the first governor in a generation to refuse the state's notorious "no-taxes" pledge. Sununu, whose father served as chief of staff in the White House of Bush Senior, saw how running afoul of that pledge undid the re-election of his dad's boss. Yet conservatives who applaud Sununu's orthodoxy on tax policy no longer dominate state politics. And recent TV ads for Shaheen have turned Bush Junior into a tar baby for the Republican incumbent.

★ 4. Virginia

The Old Dominion's status as a presidential swing state on the brink of turning blue owes in part to the deep pockets and deft ear of **Mark Warner**. The former governor, who took the reins of state from Jim Gilmore in 2002, now puts his private war chest and fine-tuned appeals for education, transportation and innovation in economic development up against his predecessor in this race to succeed five-term Republican John Warner.

The two Warners faced each other 12 years ago, when Democrats were becoming endangered species in statewide office. Mark Warner responded to that surprisingly narrow loss to invest in party infrastructure at the local, county and state level. He later launched a spirited campaign for governor that literally used bluegrass and car racing as vehicles for appealing to voters. He won.

Among the milestones of his tenure was the repeal of a punitive state regulation that barred even localities and corporations in the state from covering workers' domestic partners. Since 2005, Warner has helped fellow Democrats Gov. Tim Kaine and Sen. Jim Webb win successive statewide elections. Surveys in his Senate race place him 20 points ahead of Gilmore. ■

HANS JOHNSON, a contributing editor of *In These Times*, is president of *Progressive Victory*, a consulting firm, and writes on labor, religion and political campaigns. He co-wrote the *New Members of Congress Almanac for the 105th Congress*.

The View From Ohio

Will voters in the economically ravaged Buckeye State 'get over' race and support Obama?

BY DAVID MOBERG

CLEVELAND—WINNING OHIO WILL BE important, maybe even essential, for Sens. Barack Obama and John McCain this fall. And the decision will likely come down to the wire, depending in part on wavering voters like Ruth Santo, a retired department store manager living in Rocky River, a flag-festooned middle- to upper-middle income suburb of Cleveland.

Concerned about the economy and healthcare, and critical of President Bush, Santo worries most about young people like her grandchildren.

"I don't even know what they're going to have," she says. "So many things are changing so horribly."

Obama has some good ideas, she says, but she thinks McCain is "a bit of a rebel" who would also bring change. "I think Obama is too inexperienced, but then I think John McCain is too old. I told my husband I don't know how I want to vote."

Obama and McCain remained locked in a close battle for Ohio, according to polls throughout September, even as Obama took a widening lead in national polls, like those of the *New York Times* and *Washington Post*. But some studies, such as an early September Ohio Poll, showed nearly a quarter of the state's voters are "up for grabs," undecided or open to change.

On balance, prospects look good for Obama, but uncertainty revolves around the role that white voters' misgivings—conscious and unconscious—about Obama's skin color will play in the election. In particular, can Obama and his supporters convince enough older white voters that he, more than McCain, can change the economy to help people like



Democratic presidential candidate Sen. Barack Obama speaks about his education plan in Riverside, Ohio, on Sept. 9.

SAUL LOEB/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

them and their grandchildren, despite their discomfort—stoked by Republicans—about who he is as a person?

Pocketbook issues

The worsening national economy helps Obama, as McCain flounders and large majorities see Republicans as responsible for the financial crisis. Ohio has suffered economically throughout the past eight years, never regaining the number of jobs the state had before the 2001 recession.

Unions are attacking the role of McCain and his campaign manager in approving

the DHL takeover of Airborne Express, which is now resulting in more than 8,000 workers losing their jobs in southwest Ohio. They are also criticizing McCain for his support of free-trade deals that they blame for the recent troubles of century-old Norwalk Furniture, in Norwalk, Ohio, which has almost been undercut out of existence by Chinese imports.

Economic anxieties push both independents and even some Republicans toward Obama—or at least away from McCain.

"I'm very scared right now with the economy," says Taryn Cottell, 33, who earned a

master's degree in business administration but now stays home with two kids in the working-class suburb of Lakewood. She says her husband, a manager of an insurance company, "will probably vote for McCain" because "he's been raised to be very conservative." But, Cottell says, "I'll probably vote for Obama. I'm not strong one way or the other, but I tend Democratic. It's just Obama's viewpoints on education. And I'm very much pro-choice. Palin's selection was a great move by McCain for the election, but not if they get elected."

"I'm really a Republican, an old rich guy," says George J. Flannik, 60, a retired gas company manager whose retirement investments have suffered and who now works part-time cleaning up shopping center parking lots. He's upset about the economic crisis and the Iraq War's drain on the military and the nation's wealth. And he's ready to vote Democratic.

"I think you'll find a lot of Republicans voting Democratic because of their worries about the economy," he says. "There's not too much about Obama that appeals to me, but I just want to slap the Republicans in the face and say, 'Enough is enough.' All the grandparents are saying, 'What's going to happen to our children and grandchildren?' I'm worried about there being no good jobs for them."

Most Republicans, like two of Flannik's neighbors who are 30-something financial-service industry employees, support

McCain. They aren't enthusiastic, but they see him as more experienced. They also ideologically favor cutting taxes and spending, and say they want to "finish what we started" in Iraq. Unlike the energized evangelical Christian conservatives, they aren't impressed with the meagerly qualified Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin as his vice-presidential choice.

A changing electorate

This year's Ohio electorate is more Democratic than in past elections, and the party is in better shape to influence the election. Since 2004, Democrats have registered 1 million new voters, compared to 356,000 for the Republicans, according to the *Columbus Dispatch*. And the 2006 elections saw Democrats sweep out Republican state office holders, electing Ted Strickland as governor and progressive Sherrod Brown as U.S. senator.

Democrats also will likely gain from increased enthusiasm among young and minority voters. The Obama campaign, for example, has been signing up new voters in an African-American ward on Cleveland's east side where only 20 percent of eligible voters cast ballots in 2004. And at Cleveland State University (CSU), most of the predominately working-class and middle-class students I interviewed strongly backed Obama.

"If you like the way things are going, vote for McCain," says 25-year-old CSU

finance major James Evanoff, whose normally Democratic mother is leaning toward McCain. "If you want better, go Obama. If you're worried about experience, remember Palin is one heartbeat from the presidency"

Even wavering students tend to lean to Obama. "I feel one candidate seems to be lying to us, and the other is too arrogant," says John Kopasaki, 20, a history student who says he is politically independent. "Obama is like we're going to do this, this and this—like he's going to part the River Jordan. I'm hoping he will do a lot of what he says. We should have universal health-care. But he sounds like he's going to burn out. But I know I'm voting Obama."

So are Kopasaki's father, a conservative, swing-voting engineer, and his homemaker mother, who is somewhat more liberal.

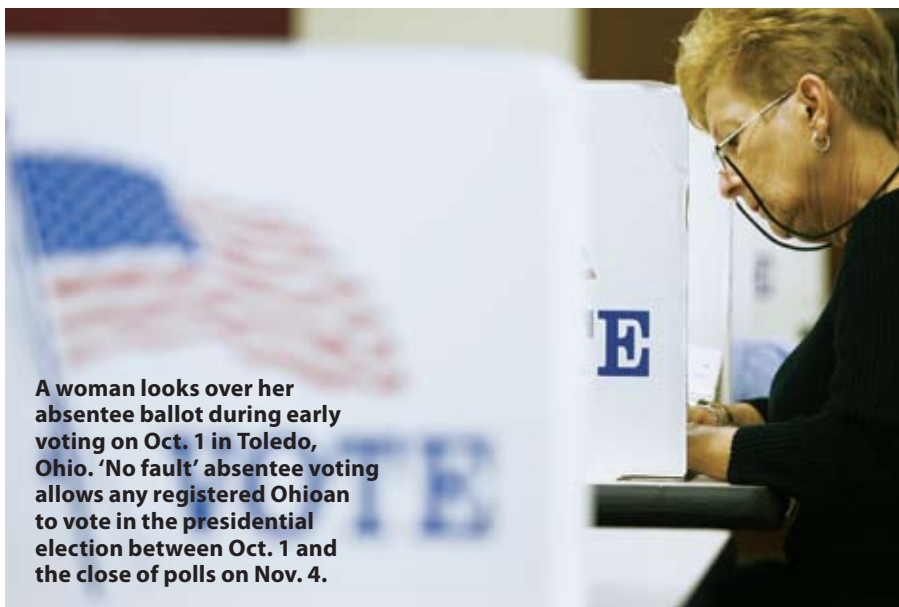
But the enthusiasm and increased registration among young people and voters of color may not compensate for Obama's apparent difficulty consolidating the Democratic base among white voters, including union members, women and older voters, who have often voted more Democratic than the Republican-trending white, non-union men of working age with some college education.

Democrats, who were hurt severely by Ohio Republicans' voting shenanigans in 2004, have an advantage this year: Democrat Jennifer Brunner is secretary of state. Although some voting rights advocates wish she were more protective, she has blocked Republican efforts to purge voter rolls and restrict early voting.

Partly because of Brunner's work, Pete Talley, coordinator of the Ohio Voter Protection Coalition, says, "I feel more confident than in the past" that voters will be able to vote and have their votes counted accurately.

Strickland and Brown have also thrown themselves and their organizations behind Obama. And both the Democratic Party and the Obama campaign seem better positioned than past Democratic efforts to confront the Republicans' well-organized ground game in Ohio.

"The Ohio Democratic Party is stronger than I have ever seen it in 30 years of doing political work," says John Ryan, Brown's state director. "There's star appeal with both



A woman looks over her absentee ballot during early voting on Oct. 1 in Toledo, Ohio. 'No fault' absentee voting allows any registered Ohioan to vote in the presidential election between Oct. 1 and the close of polls on Nov. 4.

J.D. POOLEY/GETTY IMAGES

Ted Strickland and Sherrod Brown. Both are devoting weekends and days off working hard on this campaign and talking about the economy in ways that got them elected two years ago, especially recognizing the importance of getting people in the middle class and keeping them there."

The Obama campaign has put more than 400 paid staff—many from out of state—into its Ohio operation, but a veteran Democratic consultant says that the campaign is using local volunteers more effectively than in the past. It is doing this with a decentralized system of grassroots committees that are contacting voters.

Fear of a black president

Organized labor is more divided than it was in 2004, as a consequence of the split in the AFL-CIO, and more united in other ways, as the Ohio Education Association and the traditionally politically independent Ohio UAW are working closely with the state AFL-CIO, according to state federation President Joe Rugola.

Although the long primary and divided labor union endorsements delayed much labor activity for Obama, Rugola says, "We're better positioned for a Democratic, Obama victory than either 2000 or 2004. It surprises people to hear me say it, but the driving force is that working Ohioans, organized or not, are really suffering from the Bush policies on the economy."

Union membership has shrunk by a third in Ohio since 1989, but the AFL-CIO's community affiliate, Working America, has signed up almost 790,000 non-union, working-class Ohio families that they can reach with labor's economic message.

"The big question is how to talk about race, the elephant in the room," says Harriet Applegate, executive secretary of the Cleveland-area North Shore Federation of Labor. "We've lost everything—jobs, homes, financial security. Here's a man who supports us on everything, against a guy who is against us on nearly everything. What's the issue? Some people say it will be hard to vote for [Obama]. But most people aren't talking much. It's hard to gauge. Silence makes us nervous."

Applegate says labor is trying to "make that emotional connection that he's one of us. He's black, but he's like us. A small

number of members are racist bigots, but large numbers of well-intentioned, good people have repressed racism. They don't think they're racist, but we all have some kind of racial feelings."

Sometimes race is overtly the issue. When Working America canvasser Erin McCardle asked retired firefighter Martin Linn who he would support in the presi-

Unions have found that leaflets and phone calls are not the best ways to deal with unconscious racism against Obama. 'The only way to do that is with conversations,' says one union leader.

dential contest, he answered, "One is for affirmative action, the other isn't." When McCardle pressed him about how he would vote based on the issues that affect his pocketbook, he responded: "Affirmative action affects my pocketbook. It took a job away from me."

Sometimes race comes out more obliquely. Shirley (who did not want her last name used), a CSU student whose family emigrated from China, at first talked about McCain's experience, and said she worried about Obama helping poor people at the expense of the middle class. Her family usually votes Democratic, and she insists she isn't prejudiced. But eventually she acknowledges, "I'm kind of prejudiced. An African-American leader for this country doesn't connect. I cannot accept it now—maybe 10 to 20 years later. I'm racist."

Usually race stays beneath the surface.

May Partlo, 51, seemed a prime Democratic target—burdened with medical bills and claims denied by her insurance company, angry about lost jobs, worried about relatives losing jobs, feeling economically hard-pressed and upset about not getting financial aid to go back to school. But when asked about her presidential choice, Partlo shot back: "I don't trust Obama. And I don't like his wife. His minister? Come on. And he won't say the pledge of allegiance. You should say that no matter what you believe. I'm not crazy about John McCain, but what choice have we got?"

Union leaders think that they must address the issue personally. "If you've got a problem with race or gender, I've got three

words for you," Cleveland building trades leader Loree Soggs tells his members: "Get over it."

They also distribute literature directly rebutting the most common falsehoods, such as Obama being a secret Muslim.

But unions have concluded that leaflets, rallies and phone calls are not the best way to deal with unconscious racism, the most

widespread and soluble problem.

"The only way to do that is with conversations," says Seth Rosen, vice president for the Midwest region of the Communications Workers, "not leaflets or robo-calls. It's about activating people's conscious minds—their better angels—and showing how Republicans get people to vote against their best interests."

The good news, Rosen says, is that "with labor union members now underperforming in their support for Obama—if we can get union members to support Obama—we win in Ohio. It's doable."

Maybe more frank conversations will blunt the escalating scare tactics and subliminally racial McCain ads (such as using the face of an African-American CEO when bemoaning corporate excess). Maybe reason and better angels will prevail.

The fate of Ohio and the nation may hinge on voters like Mary McNally. A white, 81-year-old widow of an attorney, she at first seemed undecided about the election, when Working America's McCardle approached her at her Rocky River home. "I don't know who to vote for," she says. "One day I'm going for one, the other day for the other."

Then she talks about how the economy is in trouble, how the United States shouldn't be in Iraq, and how even though Obama seems young and unseasoned, McCain seems old. Then she pauses and thinks a moment.

"I guess it's time we forgot about who's white and who's brown," she says. "I'm going to vote for Obama." ■

Remembering Those Other American Dreams

Democrats struggle to win blue-collar voters

BY DAVID SIROTA

IN 1977, A MIDWESTERN unionist named Ed Sadlowski made a spirited run for the presidency of the United Steelworkers. An insurgent running against the old guard at a time when the union's election was still decided by a popular vote, Sadlowski seemed on the verge of victory until he granted an interview with *Penthouse* magazine.

As author Thomas Geoghegan recounted in his 1991 book, *Which Side Are You On?*, the ensuing controversy had nothing to do with the publication's pornography, and everything to do with Sadlowski insisting that America should be "a country where people don't have to work in coke ovens."

"A terrible howl went up from the Official Family and from some of the older workers," Geoghegan wrote. Though Sadlowski was railing against intolerable working conditions that most Americans oppose, his political enemies portrayed his remarks as an elitist veneration of white-collar work over blue-collar labor—at the time, akin to blasphemy. The smears worked, and Sadlowski lost his election.

Fast forward to the 1997 film *Good Will Hunting*. The story revolves around a 20-year-old orphan from working-class South Boston, who opts for manual labor jobs rather than using his math genius to get a professional gig.

"I don't see anythin' wrong with layin' brick," he says at one point. "That's somebody's home I'm buildin'. Or fixin' somebody's car, somebody's gonna get to work the next day 'cause of me. There's honor in that." But that outlook is simply unacceptable to his blue-collar buddies.

"In 20 years, if you're livin' next door to



me, comin' over watchin' the fuckin' Patriots' games and still workin' construction, I'll fuckin' kill you," his friend warns him. "You're sittin' on a winning lottery ticket. ... It'd be a fuckin' insult to us if you're still here in 20 years."

Movies may be fiction, but they represent the attitudes of the media and Hollywood elite who shape pop culture. In the difference between how Ed Sadlowski and Will Hunting were treated for their beliefs, we see one of the least examined shifts in how work is presented in popular discourse—from both blue-collar and white-collar jobs being depicted as respectable ends, to blue-collar work portrayed as respectable inasmuch as it helps the laborer reach the venerated professional class.

This is the profound but subtle message of the last scene of another movie, *Office Space*, in which Peter Gibbons quits his suit-and-tie cubicle job and realizes his dream is to work construction. That we are trained to see this decision as rare only shows how deep the elitists' rabbit hole goes.

We are all professionals now

This shift is mirrored in our political discourse. The American Dream is no longer presented as working in a General Motors factory and living a comfortably middle-class life. It is presented as a white-collar one, whereby the economically underprivileged small-town youth works hard in school, goes to college while holding down a blue-collar job,

and ultimately finds nirvana in a posh skyscraper's office. Think Michael J. Fox in the movie *The Secret of My Success*.

Economic critiques from both parties are placed within this storyline, largely revolving around complaints about underfunded college grants, poorly administered job training programs or obstructive government bureaucrats who stunt professional advancement. This, rather than attacks against tax, trade, wage and health-care policies that have made achieving the American Dream through blue-collar work increasingly impossible.

If manual laborers, farmers and small-business owners are involved in the stagecraft of national politics at all, they appear as a sepia-toned backdrop in 30-second TV ads aimed at making a candidate seem visually synonymous with Americana—but that's about it.

Political messages so closely mirroring Hollywood narratives may seem like life imitating art, but this is actually class imitating class. Most politicians, pundits and activist leaders—like most television producers and movie directors—have lived the professional dream, climbing the white-collar ladder. They therefore have no connection to, or appreciation of, any other kind of dream, even though it exists as an ideal to so many Americans.

Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) himself is the textbook example of the professional American Dream—mixed-race kid from a struggling single-parent home who claws his way into the Ivy League, the law firm and ultimately the most exclusive club in the world, the U.S. Senate.

Writing in September for the online edition of the cultural/political magazine *n+1*, Yale Law School fellow Aziz Rana noted that in rhetorically ignoring a wide swath of America that either hasn't lived that professional life and/or has no desire to, Democrats denigrate those demographics and exacerbate the party's problem of winning back the working-class voters known as Reagan Democrats. Rana wrote:

From 1932 until 1968, the Democratic Party rested on two descriptions of American life—the American Dream as embodied by the rural farmer and the industrial worker. It gained sustenance from a respect for these accounts of middle-class achievement, economic inde-

pendence and democratic inclusion. Today's party, however, has given up on establishing new forms of solidarity for nonprofessional citizens. All it has to offer is a lose-lose proposition: Join the competition for professional status and cultural privilege at a severe disadvantage, or don't join it at all.

The same could be said of the GOP, but it has become more adept at winning on so-called "values." Republicans may economically insult blue-collar America like so many Democrats, but they have long manufactured cultural solidarity—on everything from social issues to personal security ("tough on crime" laws, anti-gun control positions) to geographical polarization (rural vs. urban rhetoric).

During the 2008 campaign, Democrats have done their level best to help them.

Party of the little guy?

Obama's now-famous celebration of arugula prices and lamentation about "bitter" Americans played right into the GOP's hands, as did his party's initial reaction to Republican vice-presidential nominee Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin.

Instead of highlighting Palin's connection to fringe political causes, leading Democratic spokespeople focused on her inexperience by lambasting her service as a small-town mayor. James Carville, the supposedly brilliant "strategist," actually flashed a photo of the Wasilla, Alaska, City Hall. Evidently, the alleged "party of the little guy" was unaware that such an over-the-top reaction might suggest to millions of small-town voters that Democrats think they and their life experiences are a joke.

Same thing on the economy. Obama has eschewed the argot of blue-collar class struggle in favor of a vague and professorial consensus-ism and he has cautiously avoided populist language on issues like NAFTA that have become symbols of government disregard for non-professionals.

Worse, when Obama's spokespeople discuss trade, they preface any vaguely populist declaration with reassurances that Obama isn't a "protectionist"—the implication being that Democrats believe blue-collar jobs are undesirable and thus not really worth protecting.

Fortunately for Democrats, Wall Street's meltdown may save them from themselves. The Bush administration's request for \$700

billion for the financial industry has allowed Democrats—at least rhetorically—to better answer Geoghegan's which-side-are-you-on question. They can posture as the defenders of the working class' tax dollars and simultaneously lacerate the professional class in a way that will be perceived as appropriate to an already angry country.

If Democrats conclude the 2008 campaign with a full-throated criticism of Wall Street, speculators, brokers and executives, they could help break the perception among working-class voters that they are the party interested only in such professionals. They could prove that Democrats do identify with and respect non-professionals.

That's a big "if," of course.

Obama has raked in almost \$10 million from investment firms and has surrounded himself with the same corporate and Washington insiders that caused the crisis. While Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) was ignoring his own voting record in support of financial deregulation and stumping against "unbridled greed," Obama was touting his economic kitchen cabinet that included an array of former Bush and Clinton administration officials (including Bob Rubin—now a top executive at Citigroup, which is embroiled in the meltdown), and not a single labor-affiliated or progressive economist.

To expect Obama to rely on such elite counsel and then hit the campaign trail with a blue-collar message may be expecting too much. But maybe it isn't. If Obama has an ideology, it is one that seeks unity, and the last decade's outsourcing, wage cutting and pension raiding—combined with a housing-induced financial crisis—has forged its own unity in a blue-red country.

Everyone—except for a few at the top—feels exposed, everyone feels their own vision of the American Dream imperiled, whether they believe in an agricultural, blue-collar or white-collar dream. That convergence could nudge Obama and the Democrats far enough to the populist left on taboo issues like trade and regulation that they end up showing they value more than just professional America—that they actually respect Will Hunting, even if he keeps laying brick.

Maybe then all those Reagan Democrats will finally come home. ■

On a Mission From God

Examining Sarah Palin's ties to the Christian Right

BY CHIP BERLET AND ESTHER KAPLAN



Does Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin merely ask God for guidance, or does she believe she is carrying out divine will?

ROBYN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

WASHINGTON, D.C. — ALASKA GOV. SARAH PALIN was the star of the Christian Right's 2008 Values Voter Summit in mid-September, even though she was a last minute no-show. The Republican vice presidential candidate's name was tossed around frequently to euphoric applause at the event in Washington, D.C., while the few mentions of presidential candidate Sen. John McCain (R-Ariz.) drew only polite claps.

Topping the list of concerns at the conference were abortion and same-sex marriage, while other presentations sounded the alarm on the threats to God and country posed by stem cell research, im-

migration from Mexico, Islamic terrorists, secular public schools, sex education and liberals, in general.

Attendees knew the stakes for this election are high. The next president will appoint Supreme Court justices who will shape legal matters for decades, a point that was made repeatedly from the stage.

While some speakers outlined the political battles ahead in practical terms, others implied that this election reflected a culture war between godly Christians and the forces of Satan—embodied, of course, by Sen. Barack Obama (D-Ill.) and the Democratic Party.

One thing was clear: Many in the Christian Right now view electing Palin as a task ordained by God. The unanswered question for the rest of us is: How does Pa-

lin see herself? Is she someone who merely asks God for guidance—a fairly common practice for religious people in public office? Or does she see herself as carrying out God's will on the political stage?

The latter would suggest a theocratic worldview that runs counter to the separation of church and state. But because she has so far declined most interviews, we're left to sift through Palin's political and religious history for clues.

Back in Wasilla

All of the four churches Palin has regularly attended as an adult fall on the right of the political spectrum, support conservative social policies—such as opposition to abortion and gay rights—and have ties to key institutions on the Christian Right,

from Focus on the Family to Christians United for Israel. Some are pastored by men with strong dominionist leanings—a desire to bring government under the “dominion” of Christian theology.

One church Palin briefly attended is a nondenominational evangelical congregation, but the other three are Pentecostal, including the Wasilla Assembly of God, which Palin and her family joined when she was a child. She was baptized there at the age of 12 and remained a member until 2002, when she first ran for statewide office (in an unsuccessful bid for lieutenant governor).

Former Attorney General John Ashcroft is the most famous politician to come out of the Pentecostal tradition, which grew out of something called the Holiness Movement in the late 1800s.

Its churches are known for a lively and energetic style of worship. They also tend to be, like Ashcroft, theologically conservative and doctrinaire. Its followers have typically been “born again” as adults and are infused by the Holy Spirit during worship, manifested through dancing or speaking in tongues. They also tend to uphold rigorous traditional moral standards in the face of what they see as a sinful world, believe God’s will is revealed to believers through prayer and signs, insist on the importance of prophecy, and view the Bible as the literal word of God.

There are no indications that Palin is atypical in any of these particulars. Indeed,

consistent with Pentecostal doctrine, she has taken positions in favor of outlawing abortion and same-sex marriage, as well as instituting abstinence-only education and the teaching of creationism in the public schools. And she has come close to attributing her election as governor to divine intervention, thanking a visiting pastor, Thomas Muthee of Kenya, for her

pornography prosecutions and tamped down prosecutions related to threats and violence directed at abortion clinics. Like Palin, Ashcroft opposed abortion even in the case of rape or incest. As a senator, he fought for what later became President Bush’s faith-based initiative, which channeled tens of millions of dollars into Christian Right organizations. As attorney

‘The vote-for-this-because-God-says-so approach means that those who oppose a particular policy are violating God’s will. It turns policy issues into religious conflicts.’

win. “He just prayed for it,” she recalled earlier this year. “He said, ‘Lord make a way and let her do this next step.’ And that’s exactly what happened.”

The Assemblies of God—the fundamentalist denomination shared by Ashcroft and Palin—is generally extremely concerned with Jesus’ Second Coming and the construction of the Kingdom of God on Earth.

Ashcroft translated these beliefs directly into public life: One of his first acts as attorney general was to cover the exposed breast of the giant Spirit of Justice statue in the Justice Department’s Great Hall and to convene daily morning prayer meetings in his office.

More substantively, Ashcroft stepped up

as attorney general, he increased investigations of Muslim charities.

Palin’s own thin public record is less decisive: She campaigned for governor against benefits for same-sex partners, but once governor, she did not block implementation of a court ruling that ordered the state to provide such benefits. Nor has she tried to mandate the teaching of creationism or abstinence-only sex ed in Alaska’s schools.

But two incidents are troubling.

One is by now quite familiar: In 1996, Palin approached Wasilla’s librarian about whether she’d be willing to censor some books, possibly out of concern over a local pastor’s book arguing for acceptance of gay Christians. The librarian refused to countenance the idea, and a few months later, Palin sought to fire her (though community protest saved the woman’s job).

The second has received less attention: Last winter, when Vic Kohring, the state representative from Wasilla was convicted of bribery, Palin appointed an elder from Wasilla Bible Church to replace him. That man, Wes Keller, has since sponsored a bill to make performing late-term abortions a felony and introduced legislation lobbied for by the Alaska Family Council—a Focus on the Family affiliate—requiring public libraries to install filters to protect young people from “inappropriate” material.

In September, Keller told the *Anchor-age Daily News* that he hopes to win legislation requiring that intelligent design be taught in public schools.



The Assembly of God church in Wasilla, Alaska, on Sept. 12.

ROBIN BECK/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

The pastors

In June, Palin returned to Wasilla Assembly of God, which has supported campaigns by the Alaska Family Council on such issues as opposing same-sex marriage, to give a now widely circulated speech. In it, she asked those attending to pray “that our leaders, our national lead-

for Jesus, gave a notorious speech in August. With Palin in attendance, Brickner asserted that Palestinian attacks on Israelis were God’s “judgment” of Jews for their refusal to embrace Jesus Christ. This same church promoted a Sept. 13 Focus on the Family event called “Love Won Out,” a workshop on how to cure homo-

During the year before she became governor, Palin frequently attended a Wasilla megachurch whose pastor views America as a nation consumed by ‘horrific rebellion and sin.’

ers, are sending [U.S. troops] out on a task that is from God. That’s what we have to make sure that we’re praying for, that there is a plan and that that plan is God’s plan.”

Palin also spoke about efforts to build a \$30 billion gas pipeline, saying, “God’s will has to be done in unifying people and companies to get that gas line built. So pray for that.” None of this would matter, she added, “If the people of Alaska’s heart is not good with God.”

Steven Waldman, editor of Beliefnet, a mainstream religious online magazine, found her comments on the war justifiable, writing that to “pray that the war is part of God’s plan ... is a totally appropriate desire for a Christian—and for a Christian politician.” However, Waldman found her pipeline comments far more disturbing.

“Asserting that God endorses a particular energy strategy or public works project is exactly the sort of mindset the Founders feared,” he wrote in a Sept. 7 column on Beliefnet. “The vote-for-this-because-God-says-so approach means that those who oppose a particular policy are violating God’s will—and good Christians should view them that way. It turns policy issues into religious conflicts. Such a politician may be impervious to reason, evidence or compromise.”

Waldman continues: “If God has blessed an idea—and told you so personally—what possible argument could dissuade you?”

In 2002 Palin switched her membership to the Wasilla Bible Church, the nondenominational evangelical church where David Brickner, founder of Jews

sexuality through prayer.

During the year before she became governor, Palin “frequently” attended a Wasilla megachurch called the Church on the Rock, according to its pastor, David Pepper. Reporters at *Harper’s* magazine listened to some of Pepper’s recent sermons and discovered that he has quite a jaundiced view of America as a nation consumed by “horrific rebellion and sin” and that he told his congregants that, “The purpose for the United States ... is to glorify God. This nation is a Christian nation,” a view he has reaffirmed in subsequent interviews.

Once Palin was elected governor in 2006, she joined the Juneau Christian Center, a third Pentecostal church, where she worships while in the state capitol. According to recorded sermons reviewed by *Harper’s*, the pastor there, Mike Rose, has preached that, “We are living in the Last Days. These are incredible times to live in.” Just last spring he preached against evolution, saying, “the word of God says ... that you are not a descendant of a chimpanzee.”

Next March, Juneau Christian Center is scheduled to host a prayer evening organized by Christians United for Israel, headed by Pastor John Hagee—the religious leader whose endorsement McCain enthusiastically embraced and then was forced to reject after a sermon surfaced in which Hagee described Adolf Hitler as a tool God used to force Jews back to Israel. Hagee has indicated that violent confrontations in the Middle East are part of apocalyptic prophesies in the Bible, an “exciting” development that signals Jesus may soon return to the Temple Mount in Jeru-

A Brief History of the U.S. Relig

The Religious Right is the common name for a series of interlocking social and political movements that were knitted together in the 1970s and gained prominence in the ‘80s. For the most part, the Religious Right is composed of Christians, with a handful of traditionalists and conservatives from other religions joining in on projects where overlapping concerns exist.

Secularism may be on the rise in the United States, but a significant majority of Americans still believe in God, and about 50 percent say they are adherents of an organized religious belief system. Depending on how the question is asked, some 25 to 45 percent of the U.S. population reports that they see themselves as either “Born-Again” Christians or, in the broadest sense of the word, Christian “evangelicals.”

We know that there really is something called the Christian Right because exit polls have found that roughly 15 percent of the voters in Presidential elections say they are allied in some way with the movement.

There are three ways to view Christian evangelicals, according to the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals (ISAE): as people of faith who follow a set of specific doctrines; as an organic network of traditions; or as a self-identified religious coalition that emerged during WWII.

When viewed as an organic network of traditions, ISAE explains that evangelicalism “denotes a style as much as a set of beliefs. As a result, groups as disparate as black Baptists and Dutch Reformed Churches, Mennonites and Pentecostals, Catholic charismatics and Southern Baptists all come under the evangelical umbrella—demonstrating just how diverse the movement really is.”

Core evangelical doctrines, according to historian David Bebbington, are the belief in the need to change lives through conversion; expressing the message of the gospels through activism; a strong regard for the Bible as a guide for life; and stressing the importance of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross.

The terms Fundamentalist, Born-Again, Pentecostal and Charismatic denote specific and sometimes overlapping stylistic subsets of Christianity, and primarily are found within Protestant



Pentecostals believe that they routinely manifest gifts from the Holy Spirit, such as speaking in tongues.

evangelism. To be Born-Again implies a personal religious conversion experience that involves a powerful sense of being imbued with the spirit of God. Pentecostals and Charismatics believe that they routinely manifest gifts from the Holy Spirit such as speaking in tongues or being swept up into physical ecstasy by the Lord of the Dance.

Fundamentalists read the Bible literally, reject liberal church doctrine, and tend to shun secular society. "A fundamentalist is an evangelical who is angry about something," quips historian George Marsden. In the late 1800s, a split began within Protestantism over what was denounced as the accommodation by leaders of the Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, (and other major denominations) of the scientific method—particularly Darwin's theory of evolution. In addition, these folks were suspicious of educational reform movements developed by John Dewey, and troubled by the ideas of new immigrants and new lifestyles—which back then meant the eight-hour workday and women wearing pants. I like to think of it as the 3-D effect—Darwin, Dewey and Diversity.

—Chip Berlet

Adapted from "Religious Right, Religious Left" in Dispatches From the Religious Left edited by Fred Clarkson.

salem. He has also used Biblical prophecy to advocate for a strike against Iran.

What would McCain owe evangelicals?

Should the Republicans win control of the presidency, the political policy payoff to the Christian Right could be substantial. The *New York Times* may have declared a year and a half ago that "the religious right's era is over," but Palin's nomination is a sharp reminder of the folly of that view.

Since at least as far back as President Reagan, evangelicals have been the party's institutionalized grassroots, its believers, its get-out-the-vote foot soldiers. This bloc is as important to the Republicans as organized labor and African Americans are, combined, to the Democratic Party.

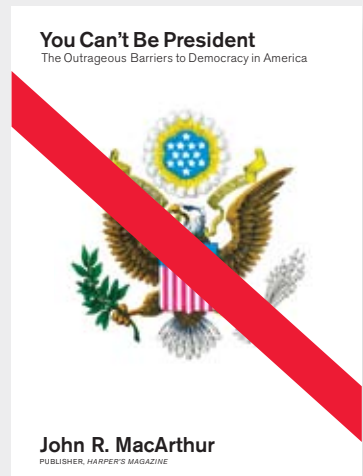
While white evangelicals constitute only a quarter of the national population, this highly motivated voting bloc made up 40 percent of Bush's electorate in 2000—and he won millions more of their votes in 2004. When that number is combined with the most religiously observant Catholics, the total adds up to the majority of votes Bush received in each election. It's a bloc so decisive in 2008 that McCain's pick of Palin, or someone with her evangelical street cred, was actually a foregone conclusion.

In return for their loyalty, Bush turned over whole swaths of this country's domestic and international policy to conservative evangelicals, from abortion and sex education to gay rights, social services, court appointments and medical research. He even used his global AIDS initiative, his foreign aid policy and his war on terror to court the Religious Right. How much more would McCain, disastrously down in the polls and in donor dollars before Palin joined his ticket, owe this constituency if elected?

We still do not know how Palin's religious beliefs would inform her approach to the vice presidency—or the presidency.

Does Palin support the most theocratic statements of pastors and visitors in the churches she's attended?

How will her lifetime of worship under the guidance of these pastors affect her approach to foreign policy, gay rights, reproductive rights, separation of church and state, science and public health?



You Can't Be President The Outrageous Barriers to Democracy in America

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PUBLISHER, *HARPER'S MAGAZINE*



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We only have a few weeks for these questions to be put to Palin by reporters. And it's her responsibility to answer them. ■

CHIP BERLET, senior analyst at Political Research Associates, is co-author of *Right-Wing Populism in America* (Guildford, 2000).

ESTHER KAPLAN, investigative editor at The Nation Institute, is author of *With God on Their Side* (New Press, 2005).

This article represents their personal views.

Russia's Monroe Doctrine

Cornered by NATO's expansion, Moscow reasserts its imperial ambitions

BY FRED WEIR

MOSCOW—BY PENTAGON STANDARDS, RUSSIA'S lightning summer conflict with Georgia wasn't much of a war.

There was no forced "regime change" and no "shock and awe," merely a swift, armored thrust by Russia's Vladikavkaz-based 58th army that dispersed an ill-advised Georgian military assault on the Moscow-protected statelet of South Ossetia. And though the Russian air force took undisputed control of the skies and targeted some aspects of Georgia's infrastructure, there was no plan to systematically destroy it. The whole thing ended with an internationally brokered deal that secured the Russian army's withdrawal to its pre-war positions and the insertion of European monitors to guarantee the peace.

But the Russian military's first foray beyond its borders since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 has triggered political shock waves beyond the region, and threatens to bring on a chill in East-West relations to rival the worst days of the Cold War.

After almost two decades of retreat from the former USSR's geopolitical positions, a resurgent, oil-rich Russia appears angry, resentful and unwilling to tolerate further expansion of NATO into its historic region.

That mood prefigures trouble ahead. Two ex-Soviet countries—Georgia and Ukraine—could join NATO's Membership Action Program as early as December. Though that's unlikely with many European states dubious, the Bush administration sent Vice President Dick Cheney to stiffen spines in the two NATO aspirant countries in early September.

"Russia's actions are an affront to civilized standards and are completely unacceptable," Cheney told journalists in Georgia's capital, Tbilisi, without acknowledging that it was



Georgian police officers escort a Russian army conscript who was driving an army truck seized near South Ossetia on Sept. 24.

actually Georgia that opened hostilities by attacking South Ossetia, where 80 percent of the population carry Russian passports and are protected by Russian troops. "Brutality against a neighbor is simply the latest in a succession of troublesome and unhelpful actions by Russia," Cheney added.

The thin red line

The original Cold War began with a series of Communist-backed coups in Eastern European countries that were occupied by the Red Army in World War II.

In 1948, Soviet leader Joseph Stalin launched a blockade to starve the Western allies out of their enclave in West Berlin. An American airlift broke the siege, followed by a series of dramatic measures, including the re-instatement of the draft by President Harry Truman. The next year, NATO was created to block further Soviet expansion.

Many Russian experts say things are

like that today—only in reverse. The "color revolutions" in Georgia, Kyrgyzstan and Ukraine brought ardently pro-Western governments to power in countries that have close historic ties with Russia. After a decade that has seen NATO absorb all the former USSR's Eastern European allies and the United States move to install strategic anti-missile weapons in Poland and the Czech Republic, Moscow has had enough.

Both Georgia and Ukraine have infuriated Russia by seeking a fast-track to NATO membership, with the backing of the Bush administration. Though their applications were postponed at the alliance's Bucharest Summit in April, the issue is slated to re-emerge at a review session in December.

"There is a red line, where Russia cannot accept further pressure on its borders in its traditional geopolitical arena," says Natalya Narochnitskaya, former deputy chair of the State Duma's foreign relations commission

and now an executive of the Moscow-based Institute for Democracy and Cooperation. "Ukraine becoming part of a hostile military bloc, and seeing NATO bases sprout in Russia's historic heartland, is simply not something we can ever accept."

Many Russian experts insist that Moscow doesn't object to Ukraine's independence, but would prefer to see it pledge neutrality and become a buffer between East and West, akin to Finland during the Cold War. Moscow objects to Ukraine joining NATO, a military alliance, but not to Ukraine's economic or political cooperation with the West.

"Russia's concern is that NATO is creating new dividing lines in Europe, which are designed to isolate and reject Russia from the European community of states," says Tatiana Parkhalina, director of the independent Center for European Security Studies in Moscow. "Russians are afraid they'll wake up one morning, and find themselves cornered and alone."

Eastern promises

In the wake of the Georgian war, Russia has moved to shore up its small local security alliance, the seven-member Collective Security Treaty Organization, comprised of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. It is also eyeing greater military cooperation with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, an assembly of former Soviet Central Asian states, plus China, and includes India and Iran as observers.

"The danger is that Russia will transfer its allegiances eastward and become an adjunct of China," says Dmitri Trenin, a foreign policy expert at the Carnegie Center in Moscow. "No one wants this, but events are taking on a harsh logic of their own."

In statements in August and September, Russian President Dmitri Medvedev spelled out a Russian version of the Monroe Doctrine, warning that Moscow will intervene to protect its citizens and business interests, particularly in the "near abroad," meaning the former Soviet Union.

"The events in South Ossetia showed that Russia will not allow anyone to infringe upon the lives and dignity of its citizens, that Russia is a state to be, from now on, reckoned with," Medvedev told a gathering

of regional leaders in September.

In moves that appear calculated to revive old sensitivities in Washington, the Kremlin has put out feelers to former Soviet allies, such as Cuba and Syria, and new clients like Venezuela. In July, a Russian delegation led by Deputy Prime Minister Igor Sechin visited Havana to explore rebuilding Soviet-era economic and security ties.

Russia's concern is that NATO is creating new dividing lines designed to isolate Russia from the European community. Russians are afraid they'll wake up one morning and find themselves alone.

A month later, Medvedev discussed sophisticated arms sales and the possibility of the Russian Navy using former Soviet port facilities at Tartus, on the Mediterranean, when Syrian President Bashar al-Assad came calling at the Kremlin.

Meanwhile, Moscow newspapers have reported similar discussions with Vietnam about using the former Soviet naval base at Cam Ranh Bay. The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed "deep satisfaction" recently when another old Soviet friend, Nicaraguan President Daniel Ortega, became the first foreign leader to extend diplomatic recognition to South Ossetia and the other breakaway Georgian territory, Abkhazia.

In September, two Cold War-era Tu-160 strategic bombers were sent to Venezuela. They were expected to be followed by a Russian naval task force in November, including the giant nuclear-powered guided missile cruiser Peter the Great, which will hold war games with Venezuelan ships in the Caribbean. Few experts believe that Moscow is really trying to revive the former Soviet alliance system, but many say that events are developing a dangerous momentum of their own.

"American foreign policy is overburdened with too many engagements just now, and its resources have proven not to be unlimited," says Narochnitskaya. "It is time for Washington to stop and re-think the whole idea of pushing NATO into the former Soviet sphere, before things start to get really out of hand."

Many Russians argue that the roots of to-

day's growing East-West rift lie in the West's failure to work with Russia to re-imagine global security architecture following the USSR's collapse, analogous to the way the victorious powers after WWII responded to a similar geopolitical watershed by developing the United Nations and a whole new set of world institutions.

Confidantes of former Soviet President

Mikhail Gorbachev allege that U.S. leaders reneged on pledges to build a "new world order" after Soviet troops withdrew from Eastern Europe and the military alliance, the Warsaw pact, was disbanded.

"Gorbachev made deep concessions to the West to break out ... of the arms race, but later, when Russia was going through a painful economic transition and we needed support, the West turned away," says Andrei Grachev, a Kremlin adviser and Gorbachev's presidential spokesman at the time. "Despite promises that had been given to us, the West decided to use [Russia's weakness and economic turmoil] to expand NATO to the East. The anti-Western moods in Russian society today can be explained by the fact that the West treated Russia as a vanquished enemy," rather than a potential partner, he says.

Though it's natural to think in terms of the last war when trouble looms, some Russian experts say the Cold War is the wrong analogy to use as Moscow and Washington head into deeper confrontation.

"Russia today is a capitalist country and part of the world economy," says Boris Kagarlitsky, director of the Institute of Globalization and Social Movements in Moscow. "Indeed, that's what's causing all the trouble. The desire to globalize is a tremendous stimulus to conflict; it's a myth that capitalist countries don't go to war over territory, markets and resources. They're using Cold War rhetoric, on both sides, to sell these new rivalries in a familiar package. But this is a new, and more dangerous world." ■



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The Selma of Immigration Rights

In Arizona, immigrants protest Sheriff Joe's nativist agenda

BY ANDREW STELZER

THE BATTLE BEGAN IN front of a furniture store.

Like hundreds of other street corners, the intersection at 36th Street and Thomas Road in Phoenix was where immigrant workers arrived before dawn, hoping that someone would pick them up for a day's work in construction. But last October, the parking lot of Pruitt's furniture became more than a pick-up spot. First, the store's owner hired off-duty sheriff's deputies to act as security guards, claiming that the laborers were causing a disturbance.

Later that month, Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio, the self-proclaimed "toughest sheriff in America," decided to act on a handful of complaints he had received. He made Pruitt's parking lot the centerpiece of a neighborhood sweep. Arpaio's deputies began arresting undocumented immigrants in the neighborhood and turning them over to Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) for deportation proceedings.

In response, civil and immigrants' rights activists began gathering every Saturday outside the store, protesting what they believe were racially and ethnically motivated crackdowns. Soon, nativist groups from across the southwestern United States—with names like the Patriots Border Alliance and Mothers Against Illegal Aliens—arrived to counter-demonstrate. Waving American flags, the anti-immigrant crowd stood across the street, holding signs that declared support for the mass arrests, the closing of the Mexican border and the immediate deportation of all "illegal aliens."

The circus-like scene made for good TV, and Arpaio, a media hound by most accounts, seemed egged on by the pro-



tests. In a Dec. 5 sheriff's office press release, Arpaio said, "I will not give up. All the activists must stop their protest before I stop enforcing the law in that area."

Finally, in January, after more than 67 undocumented immigrants had been arrested, the owner of Pruitt's agreed to stop hiring off-duty officers.

Arpaio, however, wasn't done.

Modern-day Selma

The next few months saw several more sweeps—what Arpaio calls "crime suppressions"—in different parts of Maricopa County, netting about 240 arrests, according to a sheriff's department spokesperson. However, in a pattern of

obfuscation that characterizes the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office (MCSO), the department claims it wasn't keeping arrest logs for the first four sweeps, so it isn't sure how many of those arrested were in the country illegally.

On June 27, during a typical sweep in the town of Mesa—also in Maricopa County—only 28 of 72 people arrested were undocumented immigrants, according to the sheriff's office.

An April raid in the dusty town of Guadalupe has become one of the most controversial. The town of 5,732 people, mostly Latinos and Native Americans, has no police force, so it contracts out its policing needs to the MCSO.

The two-day sweep netted 47 arrests, including nine undocumented people. And like the other pre-announced operations, the action brought hundreds of protesters into the streets.

The increased police presence has also scared residents from leaving their homes. Antonio Bernasconi, a pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, says that some women were afraid to bring their children to confirmation ceremonies. His parish's mental health agency, Centro de Amistad, has seen a rise in anxiety disorders in children—fearful for themselves or, if they were born in the United States, fear they will lose their parents.

"I don't compare it in terms of what the Jews went through in Nazi Germany," says Bernasconi. "But a lot of our people are beginning to feel that syndrome like Anne Frank, of 'Who knows when the next knock on the door is the sheriff to cart off everybody?'"

Meanwhile, he adds, real crime in Guadalupe has gone unaddressed.

"[Arpaio's] got time to be stopping people because you got a broken headlight," Bernasconi says, "but he doesn't have time to provide the services that are much more serious. . . . And when we call them they don't show up."

During the sweeps, Guadalupe Mayor Rebecca Jimenez told Arpaio that she believed the arrests were instances of racial profiling and that she would begin looking into getting out of the contract with the MCSO and find another source for

the town's law enforcement needs.

At first, Arpaio refused to back down, announcing in an April 4 press release that, "Even if they do [cancel the contract], the Sheriff still has jurisdiction here and I will still enforce the illegal immigration laws in that town."

However, in September, he decided to cancel the contract with Guadalupe himself. The sudden move resulted in lawsuits that accuse him of retaliating against Jimenez's free speech.

This stark divide now defines Maricopa County, which local activist Rick Romero calls the "Selma, Ala., of the immigrant rights movement."

Anti-immigrant cowboy

"Sheriff Joe" first gained fame after he created a tent-city prison in 1993 to prove that he could always find room for criminals, rather than release them early because of a lack of space.

In 110-degree heat, prisoners wear county-issued pink underwear, are allowed only a handful of educational TV channels, and are denied access to coffee, cigarettes, salt and pepper, and other vices that cost taxpayer money.

In 1995, Arpaio started a male chain gang, and an all-female chain gang soon followed. Sheriff Joe's prison philosophy—"If you don't like it, don't come back"—made him a hero with the tough-on-crime crowd.

When Arpaio decided to make immigrants his new target in 2005, he adopted

some of the more extreme views of the anti-immigrant movement. Press releases from the Maricopa County Sheriff's Office refer to people smuggled into the country as "co-conspirators." It's a charge the office has levied on undocumented immigrants since 2005, when Arizona's human smuggling law, the toughest in the country, went into effect.

The MCSO has arrested more than 1,000 people under the law, which allows for Class 4 (two and a half years in prison for the first offense) felony charges to be filed against both the coyote—who smuggles people in—and those who are being transported.

In 2006, Arpaio had 160 of his deputies trained by ICE. The training, conducted under a federal agreement called 287-G, allowed deputies to arrest anyone they think is illegal and then refer them to ICE. If the deputy who pulls over a suspect isn't trained under 287-G, he or she can call for backup, so that a qualified officer comes to the scene.

Maricopa County isn't the only local U.S. agency training under 287-G—there are 63 active agreements with state and local agencies nationwide—but it's certainly the one most aggressively using it. Out of the 840 officers nationwide who have undergone 287-G training, nearly 20 percent are from Maricopa County.

Chief among Arpaio's enemies is Phoenix Mayor Phil Gordon, who wrote the FBI and Justice Department in April, asking them to investigate the sheriff for racial profiling and other civil rights abuses. (Arpaio told *In These Times* that the letter was "garbage.")

In response, anti-immigrant forces launched an effort in May to recall Gordon, but they failed to collect enough signatures to make the November ballot.

Gordon says Arpaio's consistent reelection over the past 16 years and high approval ratings are irrelevant.

"Whether the majority of the people support that individual is not the question with respect to whether the actions are legal," Gordon says. "The sheriff shouldn't be measuring what he's doing on the basis of polls."

Gordon says that a third of his community is Latino, and "if [the people are



Antonio Bernasconi, a pastor at Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church, stands outside his parish's mental health agency, Centro de Amistad.

COURTESY OF ANDREW STELZER

so] terrorized, legal or not legal, that they are afraid to come out and testify because the sheriff is going to arrest them, it is counterproductive to the safety of this community.”

Magdalena Schwartz, assistant pastor at Iglesia Comunidad de Vida church in Mesa, recounts stories about her parishners, many of whom are undocumented. There’s the mother of six honor-roll students who was held in detention for three days, unable to call and tell her family where she was. There’s the 17-year-old son of a permanent U.S. resident, ready to graduate high school, who was sent back to Guatemala, where he hadn’t been since he was 3.

Worst of all was the girl who called the police to report that her boyfriend was abusing her. The police arrested her undocumented boyfriend—and also the girl.

“They asked [her] for ID, and she showed a Mexican ID, and they immediately said ‘You are illegal here. OK, let’s go,’” Schwartz recalls. “So what kind of confidence [can] we have now to call the police or the sheriff to report a crime?”

Operation Endgame

Compounding the sheriff’s sweeps is that the MCSO hasn’t collected any data about the detained. Sheriff’s office spokesman Paul Chagalla told *In These Times* that the department doesn’t keep data on the ethnicity of arrestees.

It wasn’t until the fifth “crime suppression operation” that the MCSO began compiling arrest logs from each operation—a move that came only after repeated demands for information by the press and the public. That lack of hard numbers presents obstacles for legal tactics like a class-action lawsuit filed in July by the ACLU, Mexican American Legal Defense and Education Fund, and others that charges the MCSO with racial profiling.

“We have to be really smart about collecting the data that we need in order to put a stop to this,” says Lydia Guzman, who founded Respect/Respeto—an organization with a 24-hour hotline for immigrants. Since its founding in January, Guzman’s group has been receiving up to 50 calls per day.

Rick Romero, the chief organizer of

the Citizens Walk for Human Dignity, a weeklong protest march from Tucson to Phoenix, says he has been asked for proof of citizenship several times—including once at a hospital, as a condition of admission for treatment. He says his wife has also been stopped and questioned.

“I learned because I’ve been pulled over so many times for various reasons that the only thing that really settles the argument is if you have a Social Security

card,” says Romero, who was born and raised in Arizona.

Many who joined Romero on the 120-mile journey focused their daily press conference comments on Operation Endgame, a 2003 ICE directive to “remove all removable aliens” from the United States by 2012. Some fear the major ICE raids this past summer in Iowa and Mississippi—and an increasing number of smaller raids throughout the country—could be a step toward Endgame’s unattainable goal.

One of Endgame’s written objectives, according to documents obtained by the Massachusetts ACLU, is to “enhance partnerships with local law enforcement agencies to develop, implement, and maintain an integrated system to share information, intelligence and resources, and to coordinate enforcement actions.”

Cooperation between the MCSO and ICE certainly meets this objective, and many Arizonans believe their home state is a test case for whether the removal strategy can work on a national level.

Anti-immigrant laws

Anti-immigrant fervor in Arizona began in earnest in the wake of 9/11, and increased over the next few years. In 2004, Arizona voters approved Proposition 200, a citizen’s initiative that mandated people to show proof of citizenship at the polls on Election Day.

“That opened the floodgates to more

anti-immigrant rhetoric by legislators, because they saw the overwhelming support that it had by voters,” says Guzman. “So by the 2006 election, all of the candidates [who] were running ... had something to say about immigration because it was a popular thing.”

That same election also saw a flurry of ballot initiatives targeting the Spanish-speaking population:

- An amendment to the state consti-

Many locals fear the sweeps might be test case for Operation Endgame, a 2003 ICE directive to ‘remove all removable aliens’ from the United States by 2012.

tution making English the official state language. (In 2000, voters had already made English the only language that could be taught in Arizona public schools.)

- A law that denied awarding punitive damages in civil court cases to persons who are in the United States illegally.
- Another law that denied bail to undocumented immigrants who are charged with serious felonies.
- And last but not least, Proposition 300, which denied all “state and local benefits” to those who could not provide proof of citizenship, including college scholarships and financial aid.

State Rep. Kyrsten Sinema has been battling the anti-immigrant forces since she was elected in 2004.

“Many members of the legislature are placed in a very precarious position,” Sinema says. “They personally don’t agree with these pieces of legislation, but are facing a lot of intense pressure from fringe elements of their political party.”

She estimates that about 25 percent of the people who enter the United States illegally live in Arizona. Compounded with a tough economy, she understands why that makes people upset. But Sinema, like Mayor Gordon, says the solution lies with the feds.

“If the federal government refuses to act ... what you’re seeing in Arizona will

get worse,” Sinema says, “and you’ll see other states begin to take this kind of misguided and inappropriate action.”

Bankrupting Maricopa County

Arpaio rejects all charges of racial profiling or scare tactics.

“The only people that should be fearing to go out are those that have violated the law ... and that includes illegal immigrants,” he says.

While prisons and chain gangs made Arpaio famous, so far no evidence exists that the measures have prevented crime. In fact, a 1998 study by Arizona State University Criminal Justice professor Marie L. Griffin—and commissioned by Arpaio himself—found no difference in the recidivism rate or the attitude of inmates who served time after Arpaio’s new prison policies were implemented. Crime rates haven’t decreased, and the prison population itself has continued to grow in correlation with the national average.

Meanwhile, the financial impact of Arpaio’s policies has begun to draw fire, as well. A December 2007 investigation by the *Phoenix New Times*, a weekly paper, found that from 2004 until 2007, the Maricopa County Sheriff’s Office has more than 50 times as many lawsuits filed against it than sheriffs’ agencies in Chicago, Houston, Los Angeles and New York combined.

Losses in court, legal fees and out-of-court settlements (mostly for the mistreatment or neglect of prisoners) have cost county taxpayers more than \$41 million since Arpaio took office in 1993. What’s more, the deductible for the county’s insurance policy that covers lawsuits against the sheriff has risen from \$1 million to \$5 million over the past decade.

At the same time, the number of undocumented immigrants in Arizona may be dwindling.

“They’re leaving,” says Bernasconi, who had trouble finding subcontractors to finish building his daughter’s house in Guadalupe earlier this year. “They don’t have the people for laying the tile, putting in the carpets, putting in the cabinets. ... They are going to other states or they are returning to Mexico.”

Annie Loyd, an independent candidate

for a local congressional seat, points out that Arpaio’s sweeps are the second recent hit to local business. The first came in January, when a new state law came into effect, fining employers for hiring undocumented workers, and eventually shutting down those businesses.

“Our employer sanctions law created an un-level playing field for us as a state

means fewer customers, and the bad press associated with nativist groups squaring off against immigrants in the streets doesn’t help the local chamber of commerce attract new business to the area.

Nathan Newman, policy director for the Progressive States Network, who authored a September report titled “The Anti-Immigrant Movement That Failed,”

The number of undocumented immigrants in Arizona appears to be dwindling. ‘They’re leaving,’ says a local priest. ‘They are going to other states or they are returning to Mexico.’

in comparison to other states,” Loyd says. “Immigration is a federal issue and needs to be resolved at a federal level ... because it is supposed to be applied equally, across-the-board, throughout the country.”

In the end, it may be the business community that determines if the Maricopa crackdown will continue unabated.

“I consider myself a conservative voter,” says Bob Sitesburg, the owner of Golden Sky Construction in Phoenix. But he says laborers have become increasingly hard to find, and adds that the immigration issue could affect his vote in November. “I’m in an industry where we need those workers,” Sitesburg says.

In January, Arizona became the first state to legally require employers to use E-verify, a Homeland Security system that verifies new employees legal status. President Bush followed suit in June, signing an executive order that mandates all government agencies to use E-verify.

But the system is widely criticized by government officials and business owners, for its 4.1 percent error rates, and for the fact that participating in E-verify doesn’t protect a business that is caught employing illegal immigrants, even if those workers were cleared by the system. It’s just the latest burden for Arizona businesses, which have put a proposition on the November ballot that would loosen the new employer sanctions law.

Local businesses in Phoenix have become increasingly concerned, as well. People moving away or hiding at home

says workplace sanctions, in particular, have raised bipartisan opposition.

“It’s probably the only [issue] I could see,” he says, “where you end up with the chamber of commerce, the head of labor unions, religious groups and human rights groups, all so unanimous in saying ‘This is the wrong approach.’”

Newman’s study found that the majority of states haven’t jumped on the anti-immigrant bandwagon. And because of business concerns, he doesn’t believe they will.

“It’s not like these waves of anti-immigrant legislation are new things in American history,” Newman says. “This comes in waves, and states have gone through this sort of hysteria in the past. California went through this in the early ’90s. And they looked at it and said ‘Yeah, well, we don’t think so.’”

But Arizona is not California, and there was no Sheriff Joe in Sacramento 15 years ago. Joan Koerber Walker, CEO of the Arizona Small Business Association, compares Phoenix, the fifth largest city in the United States, to Detroit, which held that rank in the ’60s.

“Law enforcement [in Detroit], with the best intentions, went into heavily racially concentrated areas, specifically looking for felons and lawbreakers,” she says. “The community became polarized, eventually violence broke out, and the businesses in the city of Detroit, many of them never reopened and never recovered.”

She adds: “I would hate to see Phoenix go the same way.” ■



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BY DAVID BARSAMIAN

Citizen Gore Vidal

Gore Vidal is one of the singular literary figures of this era. A scion of a political family, he grew up in a milieu of power and politics. Winner of the National Book Award in 1993 and the National Book Critics Circle Award in 1982, Vidal is the author of scores of plays, screenplays and

historical novels, including *Lincoln* and *Julian*. He also has written a number of bestselling nonfiction books, including *Dreaming War*, *Imperial America* and *Perpetual War for Perpetual Peace*. The *Washington Post* calls him “the master essayist of our age.”

You have a role as a kind of Cassandra of the United States. A couple of years ago, you were talking about the impending economic collapse of the country.

We’re in it. But my predictions—I’m a master of the obvious. If you spend money at this rate on an unjust war—and a war that will have no outcome favorable to us, ever—don’t be surprised.

Bush is insane. We have a better word in Italian. It’s *deficiente*. He’s deficient in the mental department. *Deficiente*. He got applauded when he attacked two innocent countries, Iraq and Afghanistan, and he’ll try it again. “I’ll be popular because I’m going to hit Iran. It’s the source of all evil, heh, heh, heh.” And he starts to whinny like a horse.

At this point in the republic’s history, do elections matter?

No. They’re not going to change anything. First of all, we have to get the republic back before it can matter. It’s gone. About three or four years ago, during the reign of [Attorney General Alberto] Gonzales, they got rid of the only nice thing England had left us, which was Magna Carta, due process of law. These were the

things that, when we invented the republic, the republic rested upon ... and the Constitution. It’s all gone now.

You’ve been saying for the past 1,000 years that we have only one political party with two right wings. Is John McCain significantly different from Barack Obama?

McCain is significant in the sense that he has no significance at all on any subject. The fact that he can even dream of being president after he dreamed up being a hero—that comes from him, by the way, his heroism as a prisoner of war. I don’t know how prisoners of war are ever heroes unless they escape. He didn’t. He seems to have just gone up, crashed his plane and get taken captive.

I was bicycling along the Venice Beach path a couple of days ago, and one of the beach houses had a big photograph of Obama with a very large caption that said, “Hope.”

J’en ai besoin d’espoire. I think we all need hope. I think it’s far too late. Our institutions are wrecked. He’s sown the earth with salt, this fool.

You’re talking about Bush.

Yes. He’s too stupid to know what he’s doing. His instinct, however, is totally malevolent, in which he’s in the great American tradition of American fascism. That is a word we’re told not to use, just on grammatical grounds. It doesn’t mean anything. It’s a word that applies only to Italy at the

time of Mussolini, and even then Mussolini didn’t know what it was and got terribly annoyed when foreigners would say, “Tell us, Duce, what is fascism?” “Well, you know, it’s spaghetti.” He had some flippant answer. I think we need hope.

I don’t believe if you just get a nice man or a nice woman, everything will be all right. That’s what they want us to think.

Eisenhower, in his now famous farewell address in 1961, as Kennedy was about to enter the White House, warned the country about a “military industrial complex.”

Nous voilà. We’re here. This is it.

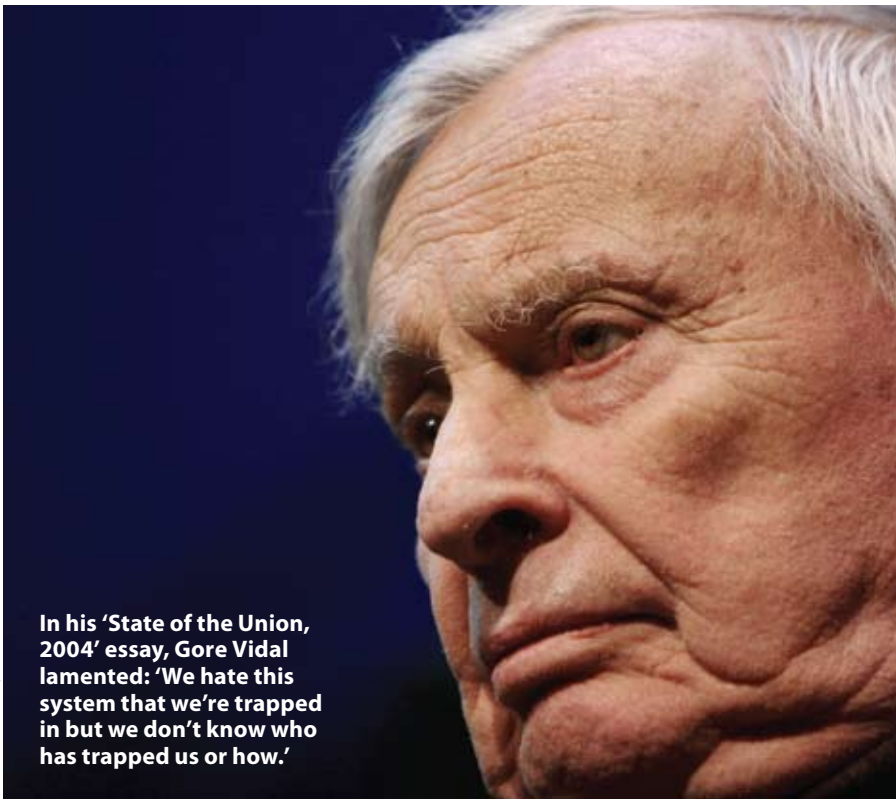
Eisenhower’s whole speech is not quoted. He said the usual things about the military and they’re getting too much power through all these vast amounts of money that are thrown at them. And then he said the greatest danger of all—and he had been president of Columbia University—will be to institutions of learning now that they are used to this flood of federal money. Everything has been militarized. And suddenly a free, independent analysis—he’s talking about history—won’t be taught. This is never quoted.

I remember reading a book—it was a Cold War polemic, as I recall—in the late ‘50s called *A Nation of Sheep*, by William Lederer. But the title stuck with me. Does America strike you as a nation of sheep?

Of course it is.

Why is that?

No one is educated. There is no educational system for the lower classes, if we can call them that. And we used to always call them nature’s aristocrats. But nature’s aristocrats don’t get educated here. And why? If you owned this place, would you want anybody to know any history or to know why anything happens the way it does? No, you



In his 'State of the Union, 2004' essay, Gore Vidal lamented: 'We hate this system that we're trapped in but we don't know who has trapped us or how.'

can't teach that. Ask any working school-teacher. They make difficulties to this day over teaching evolution. It's a nation going to commit suicide. We're too stupid to survive in an evolutionary world.

And what role does the media contribute in that dumbing down of Americans?

It's central. The media has always been corrupt in the United States, and it's more corrupt now than at any time I've ever seen it. And I've spent a lot of time in media, starting with early television.

In your "State of the Union, 2004" essay, you write: "We hate this system that we're trapped in but we don't know who has trapped us or how. We don't even know what our cage looks like because we have never seen it from the outside."

You go on to write that audiences that you address, people you meet, still want to know "who will let them out of the Enron, Pentagon prison, with its socialism for the rich and free enterprise for the poor."

I think there is an instinct out there to rid us of our masters. They know we have masters. But the masters think of new things. It was genius, whoever thought of a volunteer army. "Volunteer," that's the last word. You make a million

very poor men who have no chance for education or decent work, you enroll and give him a little extra money to be in our army and go off and get killed. And everybody feels so good about it. "You know, it's really what they deserved," is how our rulers would put it. I don't think they deserve this.

They knew after Vietnam that never again could you draft people to fight crazy wars in Asia. MacArthur's final advice, by the way, to Lyndon Johnson was, never fight a land war in Asia. Johnson knew everything, but he did it anyway.

Chalmers Johnson, in his book *Nemesis*, makes allusions to the United States looking more and more like Rome in its last days: overextended, fighting endless wars, and economically decaying internally.

But we're unlike Rome, which kept on being quite successful as a mercantile republic, which is what we used to be. Rome did rather well out of empire. We've lost everything. I'll give you my favorite Benjamin Franklin quote.

He was not a delegate to the Constitutional Convention in Philadelphia, but he went there. He went there as an ob-

server. And the people who were presiding, starting with Gen. Washington, knew that he was going to be trouble, because he asked troubling questions.

But there were about four young men who were assigned to follow Dr. Franklin around Philadelphia for the next few days until the Constitution was published, because they knew he would bad-mouth it and he would say awful things. So the kids were following the great man around, and the great man knew it. As they were all leaving what we now call Constitution Hall, an old lady said, "Well, Ben, what have you given us?"

He said, "Well, we have given you a republic, if you can keep it." Then he said something disagreeable about the Constitution.

The boys followed him outside. They said, "You know, Dr. Franklin, why are you so harsh? A lot of wonderful work has gone into this Constitution. Why are you so convinced that it must fail?"

And outside of the building Franklin started to make a speech. He said, "Every republic of this sort that we know of since the world began has failed, badly failed."

"Why, sir, is that true?"

He said, "I don't know why, but I have a suggestion. It has failed because of the corruption of the people." And he meant all of us.

What about the permanent war economy? What ways are there out there for us to get beyond being a Sparta?

We're not very good at being Sparta. We're not very good at the military virtues or even the merits. I think we will get out of it when we are eating the grass growing in the streets of our cities, and loving it. It's the only nutrient we can get. There are big fads that always start when you're about to end up eating grass. Suddenly, a lot of little ladies come out on television and say, "You will find that the hollyhock berries are very, very good." And they'll encourage us to adjust ourselves to penury and half-starvation.

Of course, it's too early to talk about your legacy, but how do you want to be remembered?

Anybody who is stupid enough to want to be remembered deserves to be forgotten right now. ■



BY SLAVOJ ŽIŽEK

Through the Glasses Darkly

When the hero of John Carpenter's 1988 *They Live* puts on a pair of weird sunglasses that he has stumbled upon in an abandoned church, he notices a billboard that once invited us to a Hawaii beach holiday now simply displays the words:

"MARRY AND REPRODUCE." Ad copy on another billboard—this one for a new color TV—says, "DON'T THINK, CONSUME!"

The glasses, then, function as a device for the critique of ideology. In other words, they enable him to see the real message lying beneath the glossy, colorful surface.

What would we see if we were to observe the Republican presidential campaign through such glasses? The first thing would be a long series of contradictions and inconsistencies:

- Their call to reach across party lines—while waging the cultural war politics of "us" against "them."
- Their warning that the candidates' family life should be off limits—while parading their fami-

lies on stage.

- Their promises of change—while offering the same old programs (lower taxes and less social welfare, a belligerent foreign policy, etc.).
- Their pledge to reduce state spending—while incessantly praising President Reagan. (Recall Reagan's answer to those who worried about the exploding debt: "It is big enough to take care of itself.")
- Their accusations that Democrats privilege style over substance—which they deliver at perfectly staged media events.

The next thing we would see is that these and other inconsistencies are not a weakness, but a source of strength for the Republican message. Republican

strategists masterfully exploit the flaws of liberalism: Its patronizing “concern” for the poor that is combined with a thinly disguised indifference toward—if not outright contempt for—blue-collar workers, and its politically correct feminism that is usually combined with an underlying mistrust of women in power. Alaska Gov. Sarah Palin was a hit on both counts, parading both her working-class husband and her femininity.

The earlier generations of women politicians (Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and even, up to a point, U.S. Sen. Hillary Clinton) were what can be referred to as “phallic” women. They acted as “iron ladies” who imitated and tried to outdo male authority, to be “more men than men themselves.”

Writing in *Le Point*, a French weekly, Jacques-Alain Miller, a follower of the late French philosopher Jacques Lacan, pointed out that Palin, on the contrary, proudly displays her femininity and motherhood. She has a “castrating” effect on her male opponents, not by being more manly than them, but by sarcastically downgrading the puffed-up male authority. According to Miller, Palin instinctively knows that male “phallic” authority is a posture, a semblance to be exploited and mocked. Recall how she mocked Sen. Barack Obama’s work as a community organizer.

Palin provides a “post-feminist” femininity without complexity, uniting the features of mother, prim teacher (glasses, hair in a bun), public figure and, implicitly, sex object, proudly displaying the “first dude” as a phallic toy. The message is that she doesn’t lack anything—and, to add insult to injury, it was a Republican woman who realized this left-liberal dream. It is as if she simply *is* what left-liberal feminists *want* to be. No wonder the Palin effect is one of false liberation: “Drill, baby, drill!” Feminism and family values! Big corporations and blue collars!

So, back to Carpenter’s *They Live*. To get the true Republican message, one should take into account not only what is

said but what is implied.

Where we hear the message of populist frustration over Washington gridlock and corruption, the glasses would show a condoning of the public’s refusal to understand: “We allow you NOT to understand—so have fun, vent your

populist pose.

What if, however, the between-the-lines Republican message (don’t be afraid, there will be no real change) is the true illusion, not the secret truth? What if there really *will* be a change? Or, to paraphrase the Marx brothers: McCain and Palin

Today, even the strongest advocates of diminishing the excessive role of Washington accept the necessity of a state intervention that is sublime in its unimaginable quantity.

frustration! We will take care of business. We have enough behind-the-scenes experts who can fix things. In a way, it’s better for you not to know.” (Recall Vice President Dick Cheney’s hints at the dark side of power, as he successfully orchestrated an expansion of presidential executive power.)

And where the message is the promise of change, the glasses would show something like this: “Don’t worry, there will be no real change, we just want to change some small things to make sure that nothing will really change.” The rhetoric of change, of troubling Washington’s stagnant waters, is a permanent Republican staple. (Recall former Republican House Speaker Newt Gingrich’s populist anti-Washington rise to power in 1994.)

Let us not be naïve here: Republican voters *know* there will be no real change. They know the same substance will go on with changes in style. This is part of the deal.

Four years ago, Sen. John Kerry lost because he was President Bush with a human face. Today, Sen. John McCain is Bush with a lipsticked face. It’s a rhetorical lipstick of “No bullshit!” When Princeton philosopher Harry Frankfurt, author of the bestselling *On Bullshit*, was asked which U.S. politician breaks out of the predominant bullshitting, he named McCain—and thereby tragi-comically missed a key point. Talking straight, displaying no-bullshit honesty, can be the cleverest form of bullshitting, a mere

look like they want a change and talk like they want a change—but this shouldn’t deceive us, they might very well accomplish a change!

Perhaps this is the true danger, since it would be change in the direction of “Country first!” and of “Drill, baby, drill!”

Luckily, as an electoral blessing in disguise, a sobering thing happened to remind us where we really live: in the reality of global capitalism. The state is planning emergency measures to spend hundreds of billions of dollars—if not \$1 trillion—to repair the consequences of the financial crisis caused by free-market speculations.

The lesson is clear: The market and state are not opposed. Indeed, strong state interventions are needed to keep markets balanced.

The initial Republican reaction to the financial meltdown was a desperate attempt to reduce it to a minor misfortune that could easily be healed by a proper dose of the old Republican medicine (a proper respect for market mechanisms, etc.). In short, the Republicans’ between-the-lines message was this: We allow you to continue to dream.

However, all the political posturing of lower state spending became irrelevant after this sudden brush with the real. Today, even the strongest advocates of diminishing the excessive role of Washington accept the necessity for a state intervention that is sublime in its almost unimaginable quantity. Con-

fronted with this sublime grandeur, all the “no bullshit” bravado was reduced to a confused mumble. Where, today, are McCain’s steely resolve and Palin’s sarcasm?

But was the financial meltdown really the awakening from a dream? It depends on how the meltdown will be perceived by the general public. In other words, which interpretation will win? Which “story” about it will predominate?

When the normal run of things is traumatically interrupted, the field of “discursive” ideological competition opens up. In Germany in the late ’20s, Adolf Hitler won the competition for the narrative that explained to Germans the reasons for the crisis of the Weimar Republic and the way out of it. (His plot was the Jewish plot.) In France in 1940, Marshall Petain’s narrative, that France lost because of the Jewish influence and democratic degeneration, won in explaining the reasons for the French defeat.

Consequently, the main task of the ruling ideology is to impose a narrative that will not put the blame for the meltdown onto the global capitalist system *as such*, but on, say, lax legal regulations and the corruption of big financial institutions. Against this tendency, we should insist on the key question: which “flaw” of the system *as such* opens up the possibility for—and continuous outbreaks of—such crises and collapses?

The first thing to bear in mind is that the origin of the crisis is a “benevolent” one. After the dot-com bubble exploded in the first years of the new millennium, the decision across party lines was to facilitate real estate investments to keep the economy growing and prevent recession. Today’s meltdown is the price paid for the United States avoiding a prolonged recession five years ago.

The danger is that the predominant narrative of the meltdown will be the one that, instead of waking us from a dream, will enable us to *continue to dream*. And it is here that we should start to worry—not only about the economic consequences of the meltdown, but also about the obvious temptation to reinvigorate the “war on terror” and U.S. interventionism in order to keep the economy running. ■



The film *XXY* was slated to be shown at Russia’s first international LGBT film festival, but St. Petersburg officials shut down the festival on opening day.

FILM FESTIVALS

Closeted Russia

By Julie Englander

WHEN IRINA SERGEEVA first ventured outside her native Russia, she was struck by the contrast between gay culture at home and in Western cities like New York.

There aren’t a lot of places for gays in Russia beyond bars and clubs that dot its big cities, she says: “If you don’t want to drink beer or alcohol, there’s nowhere to go.”

For years, Sergeeva, along with Ksenia Zemskaya and Manny de Guerre, tried to think of ways to enrich the lives of gay people in Russia. Finally, in 2007, they decided to organize a film festival—though they had no experience with organizing.

Bok o Bok (or “Side by Side”), Russia’s first international lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) film festival, was scheduled for Oct. 2 to 5 in St. Petersburg. Organizers anticipated 3,000 to 4,000 attendees. But on the morning of Oct. 2, the St. Petersburg fire department—citing code violations—closed the venues where the event was to take place.

The festival logo, a sketch of two smiling stick figures, hugging and sharing a single pair of pants, belies the risk festival organizers took in planning the breakthrough event, to say nothing of the risk many LGBT Russians face on a daily basis.

Although it’s no longer illegal to be gay in Russia—after Article 121 of the Soviet Criminal Code was repealed in 1993—ho-

mophobia is still rampant.

“It’s strange,” says Kevin Moss, editor of the anthology *Out of the Blue: Russia’s Hidden Gay Literature*. “Before, you could almost understand the secrecy, and yet now, even with all the contact Russia has with the West, gay people just aren’t out.”

At least, not publicly.

“We have partners, we pay taxes, we are whole people,” says Zemskaya. “But most gay Russians don’t have a vision of themselves in the future.”

The freedoms that gay Russians began to explore in the ’90s, says Scott Long, director of the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Rights Program at Human Rights Watch, all but disappeared under President Vladimir Putin’s regime.

In 2006, riot police thwarted Moscow’s first gay pride parade and, according to news reports, stood by while skinheads and nationalists threw smoke bombs and eggs at LGBT activists.

“Moscow Pride was really important in revealing the depth of hatred and police indifference,” Long says. “But if there’s going to be a real LGBT movement, it has to affect people the other 364 days of the year.”

Moscow mayor Yuri Luzhkov called such rallies “satanic.”

“As long as I am mayor,” Luzhkov declared, “we will not permit these parades to be conducted.”

In 2007, several activists and European members of parliament demonstrated in support of a pride parade. Again, police offered little or no protection against an-

ti-gay counter-protesters.

In less urban areas—where discrimination and violence against LGBT people often goes unreported—the homophobia is even worse. Although Russian police don't aggregate statistics on hate crimes, Human Rights Watch's Long says, "Civil society is about an inch deep outside Moscow and St. Petersburg."

As for the film festival, Nikolai Burov, chairman of St. Petersburg's Committee for Culture, told the Russian press he would not interfere with the festival, but would not endorse it either.

And in a sidebar to a January article on St. Petersburg's news and lifestyle website *gazeta.spb*, a poll of the site's readers showed that two-thirds opposed the festival.

Festival organizers say they made an effort to build broad support, citing the encouragement of local and international artists and activists, most notably Russian musician Svetlana Surganova and British human rights campaigner Peter Tatchell.

The festival was backed not only by

activist sponsors like the International Lesbian and Gay Association, but also corporate ones: Absolut Vodka signed on, as did *Time Out St. Petersburg*.

What's more, they curated several films—such as the American documentary *Freeheld* and the French feature *Water Lilies*—that have won awards at international film festivals, as well as received praise from non-LGBT groups. This was an attempt to block accusations against the festival's artistic merits.

Nonetheless, PIK Cinema, where the festival was to be held, withdrew as the venue in mid-September, offering no explanation, but promising ticketholders a refund. Organizers called the snafu a mere administrative inconvenience and said films would later be screen at St. Petersburg clubs.

Though it was difficult trying to bring the festival to life, organizers say they had no choice. Says Zemskaya: "We can stay in the closet and be afraid or take a risk." ■

FILM

Moore Than You or Me

By Michael Atkinson

WHATEVER YOU SAY about filmmaker Michael Moore, we should consider ourselves blessed to have such a professional agent provocateur running amuck in our national media circus, raising the heartland's consciousness and making the fat cats furious. We should as well take satisfaction that the corporate system—however pervasive, powerful and profit-mandated—is helpless to stop him.

No matter Moore's persona—however much he chafes and self-promotes—he is one of the few uncompromised progressive voices in the American mainstream, and he's easily the most visible.

Yet Moore is loathed—not merely by conservatives—but also by Democrats

[art space]



ART AND HUMAN RIGHTS

Life is bound by the finite, but art lends itself to infinitude when human rights are shackled.

In 1990, Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi was elected national leader of Burma—dubbed Myanmar by the ruling junta. The activist and co-founder of the National League for Democracy has been an artist of freedom, even as a political prisoner of the military government.

In October, the Mirca Art Group will release *Freedom and Art*. The book, available on Amazon and the Amnesty International website, contains 70 pieces by international artists, including Carla Goldberg, whose work "Searching the Passage" is shown here at left.

Freedom and Art is dedicated to Suu Kyi. Proceeds benefit the fight for human rights.

—Elizabeth Kiefer

and liberals of all stripes, who apparently cannot abide Moore's affected working-class-Michigan profile and his shameless knack for self-aggrandizing and demagoguery. But it's clear to me that Moore's public showmanship and character are media tools, and the tasks he applies them to are always righteous and necessary.

This puts critics and educated liberals in a bind, because Moore's films are not for us. They're pedagogic acts, aiming low, and are less important in and of themselves than the public awareness and influence they might produce, in the millions of voters and consumers who don't read *In These Times*, watch Keith Olbermann or read the new anti-Bush hardcovers.

If we're delighted by documentaries like *Bowling for Columbine*, *Fahrenheit 9/11* or *Sicko*, it's only because we are the converted, watching our rage being sung to the heavens and hoping a Florida swing voter is listening with us. Other viewers, blue-collar voters in Colorado, Florida and Ohio, say, might learn something.

Of all of his films and TV shows, Moore's new *Slacker Uprising*—available free as a download online—might be the camel's-back-breaking straw for many Moore-wary viewers.

Little more than a filmed record of Moore's 2004 get-out-the-vote national tour, the film hops from state to state, college arena to college arena, as Moore rallies students to vote against President Bush in more than 60 cities.

The marrow of Moore's schtick has always been the dialectic between appalling corporate facts about American inequity, and the witty, hypocrisy-skewering stunts he contrives around them.

But there's almost none of that in *Slacker Uprising*.

The 90-odd-minute feature is made up almost entirely of Moore taking the stage in front of one screaming, full-throated student audience after another, and then bellowing simplistic aphorisms at them. Occasionally guest stars appear—musicians Eddie Vedder, R.E.M. and Steve Earle, and actor Viggo Mortenson—to no great purpose.

The movie tries to make a thrilling



Filmmaker Michael Moore speaks during the 2004 *Slacker Uprising* tour.

narrative out of Moore's tour, but a few censorship squabbles aside, there's no news in it. A montage of uproarious, idiotic Bush supporters leavens the repetition a bit, as does a climactic, heart-sinking recap of the poll-slip suffered by Sen. John Kerry (D-Mass.) in the home stretch running up to Election Day 2004.

But *Slacker Uprising* is empty as protest satire goes, and it lends a cudgel to those who think Moore does what he does for the sheer sake of ego and power.

Time and time again we're presented with the spectacle of Moore's shambling form being hailed by thousands of roaring college kids as if he were a messiah figure—an idea that has no relation to reality (rallying college kids like to scream and shake their fists and see famous people).

But here, distilled and edited down into a parade of glory moments, the routine comes off as vaguely distasteful, even suspicious. Couple that with the swooping rock-concert camera pans over the crowd, and relentlessly anthemic music, and what you've got is a strained attempt to get us mindlessly riled and on Moore's bandwagon without the benefit of having been told anything new—or even having heard a good wisecrack.

Still, however egomaniacal Moore may be, his tour helped get a record 21 million young voters out in 2004. And the deci-

sion to offer the film for free in the fall of 2008 is clearly spurred by a desire to affect the turnout of this cycle.

In both situations, it's hard to imagine that *Slacker Uprising* will influence the judgment of any but the most naive and most easily impressed 19-year-old.

Of course, we all hope it might—or hope anything might—and so it's difficult to accuse Moore of exploitation when the perfect end product of his labors would be a fair economy and the end to a cretinous foreign policy.

We know Moore's campaign failed in '04, a bedevilment Moore attributes in a final title card to the fact that, although Kerry won the young vote by a landslide, "their parents voted for Bush."

What can be done?

Slacker Uprising has its inspiring moments. It's hard to resist Moore's calculated but authentic salutes to veterans and serving military, finding them in his massive audiences and then insisting everyone else stand and applaud in gratitude.

Still, how can the movie significantly contribute to a Democrat win this November, when the presumably exhausting tour itself did little to alter the outcome of Kerry vs. Bush?

We all do what we can, but let's face it: Love his baseball cap and folksy manner or not, Moore still does more than you or me, and a pitcher without his best stuff is still playing the game. ■

BOOKS

Toilet Ecology

By Laura Orlando

ROSE GEORGE ARGUES in her book *The Big Necessity: The Unmentionable World of Human Waste and Why It Matters* (Metropolitan, October) that the “big necessity” is a toilet.

For 2.6 billion people, George writes, the lack of access to a hygienic toilet can result in “crippled guts and killed children.” Every 20 seconds a child dies because of abysmal sanitation conditions, mostly from exposure to infectious agents, like the *Vibrio cholerae* bacteria, which move from gut to gut by way of feces. Contain the feces and the pathogens are contained, too.

It is a simple and straightforward story that George tells with ease as she crisscrosses the globe profiling efforts to improve sanitation for the world's poor.

But the problem is more complex than she allows. There is nothing simple about toilets—or “necessities,” as they were once called.

A toilet can be a hole in the ground (as in the case of an outhouse) into which urine and feces are deposited, which then can seep into the groundwater. Or it can be the means via which this human excreta is flushed into a sewer system, where it is joined by storm water and industrial wastes. But can either disposal system be considered hygienic?

Transnational institutions, such as the World Bank and WaterAid—a British charity started by large private water corporations—play an enormous role in framing the entire discussion of what proper “sanitation” entails.

The tropes promoted by such organizations seem unquestionable.

First, poor people will defecate anywhere if they are not provided “toilets” (here a euphemism for latrine); and they must pay for these “toilets” or they will not value them.

Second, where there is institutional funding, sewers and sewage treatment are the best ways to manage domestic and industrial waste.

These two postulations are related be-

cause latrines—stinking, unpleasant devices—drive people to flush toilets and the accompanying sewer systems.

Sewers are big business for corporations, governments and donor agencies. In the United States, total spending on sewer and water from 1991 to 2005 was \$841 billion.

In the '70s and '80s, for example, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) spent \$3.45 billion on water and sanitation projects in Egypt. Every penny of this money went to U.S. corporations.

George is an unapologetic fan of sewers. She calls them “unassailable as the default option of how to dispose of human excreta in sophisticated, wealthy places.” This is a mistake.

Sewers look good on World Bank loan portfolios and the income statements of the companies that build them. But from the point of view of long-term, sustainable public and environmental health, they are a disaster.

It is true that deaths from typhoid and cholera—the great waterborne killers of the

19th centuries' open sewers—were greatly reduced with the combined use of closed pipe sewers and drinking water treatment. But a greater and more complex group of killers is now in the sewage or result from sewage treatment itself. And this is a threat that George gives short shift.

In the '40s, wartime production and a subsequent push by government and the chemical industry to get new synthetic chemicals into commercial use resulted in massive quantities of such chemicals entering the sewers after being discarded by industry and households, as well as “run off” from roads.

Current sewage treatment is designed to address only a handful of parameters: biodegradable organics like proteins, carbohydrates and fats from food and excreta; and suspended solids.

Yet each day, 42 billion pounds of chemical substances are produced or imported in the United States for commercial and industrial uses. George ignores the fact that no technologies exist to “treat” or make “disappear” carcinogenic, mutagenic, teratogenic and

THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



endocrine-disrupting chemicals once they are added to the sewer.

Some of these incidentally end up in the sludge, the inevitable byproduct of sewage treatment. Sludge—called “biosolids” by the sewer and sludge industry—is a toxic brew of chemicals, heavy metals, bacteria, viruses and whatever else that is repelled by water (hydrophobic) or removed from the wastewater in the treatment process.

The disposal of sludge is a contentious issue. George writes about this in the chapter “Battle of Biosolids.” Shall we get rid of it in the water, the land or the air?

Most municipal sludge used to be dumped into the ocean. But public outrage at the ocean being used “as a dump” prompted a congressional ban. Since 1988, when Congress passed the Ocean Dumping Ban Act, the Environmental Protection Agency has promoted “land application.” This means that right now, tens of thousands of acres of U.S. agricultural and other land are the dump for the noxious dregs of municipal wastewater treatment. The result is poisoned land, dead livestock and sick people.

For instance, in February 2008, a federal court judge ruled that 1,700 acres of Andy McMurray’s farm in Georgia had been ruined by sludge applications over a 10-year period. Hundreds of his dairy cattle died and the milk supplies in several states had been contaminated with high levels of thallium (the primary toxin in rat poison) that had been present in the sewage sludge spread on crops fed to the dairy cows.

And across the country, thousands of people have been sickened by sludge. You can read some of their stories at Sludge News, www.sludgenews.org/action.

The Millennium Development Goals adopted by 189 nations during the U.N. Millennium Summit in 2000 set a target to reduce by half the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation (at last count 3.7 billion people).

Counting toilets and linear feet of sewers has become the measure of evaluating success or failure in the sanitation sector.

This focus on the number of people

excerpt



DRILL FOR WHAT, BABY, DRILL FOR WHAT?

With offshore oil drilling on the national agenda, Antonia Juhasz offers a timely critique of oil, the economy, the environment and war in The Tyranny of Oil: The World’s Most Powerful Industry—And What We Must Do to Stop It (William Morrow, October).

Chevron’s *Discoverer Deep Seas* oil drilling ship ... sits in the Gulf of Mexico and sends a diamond-encrusted drill bit down through the bottom of the ship. Engineers attempt to pass the drill through one mile of ocean and more than five miles of earth in hope of hitting oil below the ocean floor.

Viewed from the air, the *Discoverer* has been described as “a ghost tanker trying to make off with the Eiffel Tower.” It truly is enormous: it is 835 feet long—on end, the height of an 80-story skyscraper—and 125 feet wide. ...

[T]he *Discoverer* has not been back to shore since it was launched five years ago. Every six months or so, a supply ship pulls up alongside it and pumps a million gallons of diesel on board. ...

But the *Discoverer* is not alone. The Cajun Express drilling platform is the *Discoverer*’s \$520,000-a-day partner. ... Plop the Cajun down in the middle of a city and it would take over several blocks and rival any high-rise. ...

Both rigs are positioned above Chevron’s 30-square-mile Tahiti oil field, which ... holds 400 to 500 million barrels of oil by Chevron’s estimates, although, as of yet, no oil has successfully been pumped from the field. ...

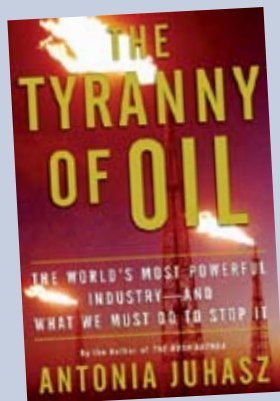
Sitting on shore ... is the supergiant offshore oil production platform the Tahiti. Just the hull of the Tahiti is 100,000-ton brown hunk of steel and iron that looks like the gargantuan cork of the world’s largest wine bottle. ...

The Tahiti will pump the oil that the Cajun and the *Discoverer* drill out of the ground. ... [But] there is no guarantee that oil (or natural gas) will be found.

Each drill bit (remember, they are encrusted with diamonds) costs \$50,000 to \$80,000—and a single well can easily chew up a dozen drill bits.

The first six exploratory wells that Chevron drilled in the Gulf with the *Discoverer* were dry holes, wells with too little oil to turn a profit. In fact, about 80 percent of all the exploratory wells drilled in the Gulf are failures.

As described by Chevron’s Mickey Driver, “It’s lots of money, it’s lots of equipment and it’s a total crapshoot.”



“without adequate sanitation” allows us to ignore the underlying socioeconomic and political troubles people face.

And George, by failing to address such issues, underscores the need for a deeper, more a critical analysis of the causes and remedies.

Until we have a criticism of conventional sanitation that encompasses not only the technologies but also the systems—political, technological, economic, managerial that drive the technologies—

we will be left with exhortations, like George’s, to “fix the problem,” but with no approach that actually can.

The needed critique will take into account on-site technologies vs. central collection, source-separation vs. mixing-then-fixing technologies. Hopefully, the choice of developing sanitation systems that are culturally appropriate, ecologically responsible and functionally sustainable will then sound downright conventional. ■

BY TERRY J. ALLEN

Paving the Road to Hell



FIND THE COMMON thread and win a free Prozac prescription: Treating cattle for lameness and fever drives vultures to the brink of extinction; planting biofuel crops

fuels forced labor and sickness; drilling wells for the poor poisons a country.

Not so long ago, millions of vultures swirled in dark, majestic clouds above the Asian subcontinent and performed a vital role: By eating carrion and waste—everything from ritually laid out human corpses to dead livestock—the scavengers cleansed the environment and checked infectious disease. Then, in the '90s, the birds began mysteriously disappearing, until today, when 99.9 percent of them are dead.

Scientists finally linked the massive die-off to the anti-inflammatory drug diclofenac, widely used to keep lame or fevered livestock on their feet. Alive, South Asia's cattle and other livestock provide milk and labor. Dead, owing to lack of disposal alternatives and religious proscriptions against eating beef, they are abandoned to vultures. Diclofenac residues, mostly in cattle corpses, caused fatal kidney disease in the vultures that feasted on them.

"[Diclofenac] seems to be effective, very safe, very cheap," J. Lindsay Oaks, a veterinary professor at Washington State University, told the veterinary newsletter JAMVA News in 2004. "It just has this unexpected environmental consequence: ... the first clear case of pharmaceutical product causing major ecological damage."

Several knock-on effects of the die-off are under investigation. With

the vultures' ecological niche empty, rat and feral dog population may be expanding in South Asia, along with the diseases they carry. In India alone, rabies, spread primarily by the country's estimated 5.5 million feral dogs, kills 25,000 to 30,000 people a year, mostly rural, often children.

Rabies is also metaphorical in Burma, renamed Myanmar by the mad-dog junta, formerly known by the deliciously sinister acronym SLORC. Its belief in astrology led the regime to move the country's capital—locks, stocks and thumbscrews—to a remote mountain location. Its reliance on numerology bankrupted much of the population by voiding decimal-based currency and printing new "lucky" nine-based bills.

More serious than this superstitious insanity are the junta's disastrous human rights and developmental policies, including a scheme that combines both: raising energy self-sufficiency, export income and carbon credits by planting the oil-rich jatropha plant on 8.36 million acres (an area the size of Maryland).

The junta deployed its army to oversee forced and prison labor, and to confiscate land for the biofuel. People were "fined, beaten and arrested for not participating," the Ethnic Community Development Forum documented in its 2008 report *Biofuel by Decree*.

Around the world, the precipitous switch from food crop to biofuel has raised food prices and undermined supply. In Myanmar, the jatropha scheme exacerbated the post-typhoon famine, and was so ill-planned that up to 75 percent of the plants died, and the small amount of oil processed sometimes damaged its machinery.

The unintended effects are not

confined to starvation and damaged engines. Jatropha yields a ricin-like poison that a competent chemist can extract. Ricin makes the U.S. Homeland Security list of potential terrorist weapons and is so deadly that 1 gram can kill 36,000 people. Washington should know. During World War II, it tested but did not use bombs spiked with the neurotoxin, codenamed "Compound W."

Reports have surfaced from Burma that hungry or curious children have become sick after eating the sweet jatropha nuts. The infectious disease watchdog organization ProMED recently posted a report, still unconfirmed, that people have been dropping dead after being bitten by a worm-like organism that feeds on jatropha.

And one more example of vast unintended consequences: Aid organizations, seeking to provide clean water, dug tube-wells in impoverished Bangladesh. Now, most of the country's 130 million people use 8 million to 12 million shallow wells, and most of the population is being slowly poisoned by the naturally occurring arsenic that the wells inadvertently tapped into. Arsenic poisoning starts with sores, progresses to gangrene and ends with cancers.

So whether it's the environment or the economy, fools—with intentions good or greedy—rush in. Without long-term planning, regulation, follow up and oversight, unintended consequences will range from worrying to catastrophic.

Go ahead and take that Prozac—but don't forget, the residue you pee will survive water treatment and end up in your neighbors' drinking water. ■

CONTACT Terry J. Allen at tallen@igc.org

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Vacation

Continued from back page

have kids.)

Canada and Japan are near the bottom of that list, with a legal minimum of 10 vacation days, while the United States has the dubious distinction of being the only industrialized nation that does not have a mandatory minimum of vacation time. In fact, out of the world's 195 independent countries, 137 have some kind of vacation/annual leave legislation in place.

Each year, de Graaf and his U.S. and Canadian colleagues work to get the word out about their annual celebration, Take Back Your Time Day, which occurs Oct. 24. (For ideas on what to do that day, see www.timeday.org.)

This year, the group plans to get presidential candidates to consider the issues involved, and to get Americans talking about how we're losing time for the non-work activities that help put our lives into balance and help us gain perspective.

De Graaf, an independent filmmaker with a long, impressive list of social consciousness-raising documentaries under his belt—including the popular PBS documentaries *Affluenza* and *Escape from Affluenza*—explains that he started Take Back Your Time to “challenge the epidemic of overwork, over-scheduling and time-famine that now threatens our health, our families and relationships, our communities and our environment.”

De Graaf says that the Obama camp has responded with “definite interest,” although he can't yet share specifics. De Graaf considers time-famine—and the need for mandatory vacation time for all Americans—a bipartisan issue, although he says he's aware that Republicans are more likely to object to national legislation.

Even some Democrats, he admits, think he is over-dramatizing the situation: Aren't there more pressing social justice issues for us to worry about? Poverty, healthcare and ethnic/gender disparities, to name a few?

“I've been told by a few prominent progressive activists that, while they're personally supportive of what we're trying to accomplish, they're not willing to get in-

involved because this is really a white, middle-class issue,” he says. “‘You couldn't be more wrong,’ is what I tell them.”

In July, Take Back Your Time released its findings from a scientific telephone sample of more than 1,000 U.S. adults. The poll revealed that more than two-thirds (69 percent) of Americans would support the passage of a paid vacation law. Most

“I've been told by activists that while they're supportive of what we're trying to accomplish, they're not willing to get involved because this is a white, middle-class issue. ‘You couldn't be more wrong,’ I tell them.”

enthusiastic about vacation-time-legislation were people under 35 (83 percent); African Americans (89 percent); Latinos (82 percent); people earning low incomes (82 percent); women (75 percent, versus 63 percent for men); and families with children (74 percent).

De Graaf says he was surprised but not shocked that such strong support came from low-income communities and communities of color. (One hundred percent of African-American respondents indicated that some vacation time was necessary to avoid burn out.)

“When you're poor, you're socially excluded,” he says. “And/or when you're working two or three jobs to make ends meet, you know how important it is to have [downtime] with your loved ones.”

But that kind of downtime is harder and harder to come by. According to the group's poll, 52 percent of working Americans received less than a week of paid vacation in the past year—more than half of those received none—while 65 percent of workers received less than two paid weeks off.

The result? Too much hard work—whether unpaid or paid overtime—really does hurt (and kill) people. Unlike the Japanese and Chinese, we haven't given death-by-overwork its own moniker (*karoshi* and *guolaosi*, respectively), much less enacted national legislation that allows surviving family members to sue over the workplace conditions that lead to such deaths (as Japan and Korea have).

In Japan, the image of a typical *karoshi* victim is that of a businessman who dies at his desk after too many 80-hour workweeks. But several international studies (in Finland, Israel, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States) have shown that while both sexes are at high risk for “overwork” consequences—heart disease, obesity, insomnia and persistent

fatigue—women are far more likely to suffer mental health consequences, especially when they do not take vacations.

A 2005 study funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health also noted that roughly one in five women reported taking a vacation only once every six years. (A 2006 “Ask a Working Woman” AFL-CIO survey explains this, in part: Nearly four in 10 women earning less than \$40,000 annually receive no paid vacation whatsoever.)

Things haven't always been this bad. Workers' lives have gone from bad to better to bad all over again. The Industrial Revolution brought extreme working conditions and 14-hour days. The late 1800s saw the beginning of an epic workers' battle for the eight-hour workday. As it turns out, Oct. 24 is the 70th anniversary of the Fair Labor Standards Act, which established the 40-hour workweek and the minimum wage in the United States. Most Americans don't know that the original wording of the bill also guaranteed mandatory vacation time for all workers.

In light of that, de Graaf insists that it's high time to enact a national policy to ensure that we don't have to feel guilty (or fearful about losing our jobs) for taking time off.

“We need the right to have that time off,” urges de Graaf. “Otherwise, we won't have the [energy for the] imagination we need to better ourselves and our communities.” ■

Vacation time shouldn't be the privilege of a few, but the right of all

BY SILJA J.A. TALVI

JACK TORRANCE, JACK NICHOLSON's character in the 1980 film *The Shining*, should get credit for popularizing (and making terrifying) a proverb that dates as far back as the mid-1600s: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy."

Nicholson's character sure looked like he could have used a vacation before his psyche disintegrated and he went on a murderous rampage.

In the real world, the danger isn't that we'll start obsessively and repeatedly typing proverbs at the Overlook Hotel before taking an ax to the door (one would hope), but that our country's hard-working denizens will keep getting sicker, sadder, less productive and more miserable.

Medical and poll-based evidence indicates that we seriously need relief. Work-related stress can lead to sudden heart attacks, obesity, anxiety and depression. A World Health Organization and Harvard Medical School study last year put the United States

at the top of the list of depressed (or otherwise mentally disordered) countries, while the Gallup Daily Happiness-Stress Index finds that the only consistent upswing in mood occur when Americans get some time off on the weekends or holidays.

As John de Graaf, executive director of the Seattle-based advocacy group Take Back Your Time, puts it, Americans are "time-starved and vacation-starved."

Americans put in more hours at work than any other nation, surpassing even the workaholic Japanese. We average nine more weeks of labor per year than our working counterparts in Western Europe, who get at least 20 paid days of vacation each year.

Finland tops the list of vacation-supporting industrialized nations with 30 paid vacation days per year after the first year of work, plus 14 paid national holidays, according to a July 2007 report from the Center for Economic and Policy Research. (This is in addition to the possibility that the country might soon grant "love holidays" so that some couples can rekindle passions and

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